Crystal Clear on a Starlit Night

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Crystal Clear on a Starlit Night

by EarthsickWithoutYou

Summary

Minister of Magic Gellert Grindelwald resolves never to fall in love again after the break-up with Albus Dumbledore left him heartbroken. Meanwhile the new King of Lamia, Charmont, is looking for love -- but a conceited and corrupt, handsome villain is (he thinks) definitely *not* his type.

When Grindelwald is invited to a royal ball in Lamia, with the mutual intention of forming an alliance between Lamia and the wizarding world, Char and Gellert begin by butting heads but soon realize their attraction. However, both are determined to dismiss the feeling as anything else even as they can't resist each other...

Notes

Thanks to Alisha for the prompt! 🖤✨

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

A magnetic force of a man

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Except for its magical qualities, Gellert thought of Lamia as a quaint, twee, insignificant little kingdom, and expected no more upon his own highly anticipated arrival than to be brought to a quaint, twee, insignificant king.

However, as the new Minister of Magic, he must keep solid diplomatic relations with all other magical lands, (which really meant control, and his own free enjoyment of their resources for whatever purpose he was inclined to direct them).

Small kingdoms like Lamia, which was nestled in an obscure dimension seldom traveled to by wizards of modern times, were especially valuable. For one thing, they made wonderful surprise allies when one went to war. The enemy would never see it coming when he had the support of a King who ruled a land with great magical power. Or when Gellert revealed whatever increase to his own abilities would be taken from his time in Lamia.

And that was the other reason why such places were key stops on his first diplomatic tour. Lamia was a rare gem, a cozy and quaint kingdom where the entire environment – the air, ground, forest, plants and animals – had magic in them. Any Lamian who wanted to could learn the magical arts. How remarkable.

Gellert's own abilities would be doubly strong in Lamia. Imagine the shocking force he could bring to any future military conquest, once he explored and mined every ounce of power to be found, mastered and wrested there.

Best of all, there were no Muggles. Everyone possessed magical ability in this land, whether or not they chose to develop the skill. It ran through their veins. Fairies lived among the humans, along with elves, giants. Nothing was ordinary.

For the Minister, this all added up to greedy feelings and nothing more. Gellert's heart remained untouched and uninterested by stories of "the most beautiful kingdom," "a dreamy land," full of adventures and sights "right out of fairy tales."

He refused to allow himself a "soft side" and had not exhibited one since his teenage years. Those times had shown him the peril and humiliation of being sensitive and open to any kind of sentiment.

The recent reunion and even more painful falling out with Albus had only confirmed his hatred for excessive soft feelings or experiences of any kind. From what he had heard, Lamia's people were notoriously cheerful and loving. It sounded obnoxious, but advantageous. They hardly sounded sophisticated or worldly enough to suspect him of any theft he might need to sneak into his visits.

There was no need to convey this information to his advisor, Oliver Crimley, as they apparated onto Lamia's royal palace grounds to a chorus of amazed *ooh's* and *ahh's* from all who witnessed their illustrious arrival. No, Crimley knew Gellert's wishes about as plainly as someone could, without being uncomfortably familiar with his interior world's deepest machinations.

However, the same could not be said of the Junior Assistant to his office, Libbie Juneberry, a regrettably *plucky* young thing who simply could not discern the proper times for speaking and not speaking. To Gellert's inconvenience, Juneberry had nothing whatsoever of substance to contribute by opening her mouth.

He was pressed to the limit of his patience every time he was forced to be in her presence, fighting the inclination to sew her mouth shut with a quick and helpful spell.

He'd been forced to hire her as a necessary evil, given that her father, Ford Juneberry, owned the grand estate bordering Wimbourne which Gellert had long since fixed upon as his most desired personal home.

Of course, a chief concern was to move the center of wizard governance away from that teeming vat of Muggle scum, London. He could hardly think straight when visiting the former offices there, as every time he did, he was overwhelmed with constant temptations to cast horrific curses on the various Muggle sources of irritating noises and behaviors flooding the streets around their small hub of peace.

Dorset was beautiful, and having such a sprawling estate of his own illustrated his ascendancy to grandeur, to prestige. He was no longer the black sheep of the wizarding community; now he ruled them all. These were important qualities with which to impress, intimidate, and thereby control his subjects. It was a house fit to be called a castle, in fact.

For Gellert, it was a delightful residence, to the extent anything delighted him these days (it was more a hope that one day it might delight him, when he could feel again).

And to anyone looking at it, or the brand new Ministry office buildings he'd had erected nearby, the estate was a silent reminder of two important factors: his power over them all, which was now unshakable, to be ignored or defied at their peril; and the magical community's dignity, its wondrous history and traditions, here unmarred, unscathed by muggle interference (however ignorant, as so much of what they did lacked thought) and distraction.

He had been loath to leave his seat in Wimbourne to embark on this tour, as this recent, final falling-out with his former lover, Albus Dumbledore, had left him secretly heartbroken and almost shockingly out of sorts.

Gellert had been driven to all sorts of extreme stress relief measures, taking his suffering out on anyone even slightly bothersome in his path, or someone who looked a little like Albus if one squinted and tilted their head the right way. It was easy to cover his crimes now that nearly everyone saw him as the very paragon of trustworthy nobility.

And yet, he was still not feeling any better, or any more capable of responding with the nearly-forgotten emotions of joy or satisfaction in anything he did or saw.

He never would have imagined that life could seem hollow to him when he finally got the power he had wanted all this time. Before he could become disappointed, he started hunting for more power, anywhere he could find it, running away from the feeling and trying to get back to his old self.

Certainly, no one outside of himself had the slightest idea of any such turmoil brewing in the respected and feared Gellert Grindelwald, the most controversial Minister ever to be elected. Within a few months, he had protected and bolstered the resources of his realm so effectively that he quickly went from controversially popular to universally admired.

He had a reputation of unflappable, steely, yet charming calm and vigor to maintain, and so he had entertained, briefly, the solution of allowing himself a summer (and only one) to do little more than lie in bed and mourn his loss of any chance at romantic love and companionship. This would occur in total solitude, whenever he was not going about his essential duties as Minister.

The tour of England on which he'd embarked during the election campaign had already been taxing on his spirits; the fight and split with Albus had put out the rest of his fiery energy.

Running on what the muggles might call "backup generator energy" was such a humiliating necessity that Gellert's first concern was to hide this fact, not only from his staff on the current tour and all those they visited, but himself as well. He would not have admitted he was grieving a lost love, even upon a knife's point or being threatened with the bitterest death curse (not that anyone would ever beat him in battle, anyway).

Still, the rest of his council had convinced him it was in their best interest to tour the remaining magical lands with which the British ministry did not have any political connection.

The last thing Gellert needed was for one of the rival foreign ministries, several of whom he intended, one day, to challenge in order to expand his own magical empire as he dreamed and conceived it, to band together with some powerful outlier before he could do so.

It bothered him greatly that he had even needed Crimley to remind him of this urgent fact, and as such, he'd flung himself with all due appearance of unaltered robustness both in the exhausting visits and his own execution of many different plots to trick his new alliances into giving him far too much of their own magical treasure.

He pasted what passed for a friendly smile these days on his handsome face, knowing that his particular brand of confident charisma was irresistible…and daunting. Gellert was a hard man to say no to; indeed, many were nervous even to address him, or too starstruck to do so. The latter was pleasing, so long as the "fans" did not pester him too much.

Juneberry adjusted her oversized cherry-red glasses on her little pert nose as a quill hovered in front of her, making quick notes on her pad. She was constantly taking notes, making record of useless minutia, but at least during such concentrated moments, like noting how

many commoners and nobles stood in the crowd welcoming them to Lamia, she stopped talking.

“Oh, isn’t it like something out of a fairy tale?” Juneberry’s notebook and quill were back in her robes’ pockets, and her lips unfortunately unsealed.

She clasped her hands over her heart and gazed at the indubitably stunning place, from the massive white castle in front of them with its medieval-style brown towers and proudly waving national flags, to the sprawling emerald fields that surrounded it and the quaint, adorable village which was visible just beyond.

The sun sat low in a hazy lilac sky, wrapping the whole scene in an enchanted sort of blissful expectation, which of course, was an absurd thought or premonition, or whatever it was.

Gellert thought he must have digested part of his lunch the wrong way to entertain such foolish notions even for a moment. They were not there to follow through on some betrothal or any other kind of disgusting ball and chain that might ruin his now sacred personal independence.

“*Romantic,* is what this place is!” Juneberry sighed as they strolled down the path leading to the castle.

When they got closer, with Gellert waving and making mild, nodding remarks of good cheer to the Lamian welcome committee, he had listened to a good two or three minutes of the junior assistant’s drivel, and beneath his resigned smile were gritted teeth.

“We’ve all made note of your rather naive and overly florid response to Lamia’s lavish charms, Juneberry.” He glared down at her and she gulped. “Cease them, lest I decide the period of negotiations for your father’s former estate has passed and it is safe to either fire you, or take more severe and satisfying measures in order to spare myself your many unsolicited and mind-numbing speeches.”

“I- I’m so sorry, Minister, it won’t happen again, Mr. Grindelwald, sir,” Juneberry blathered, not helping her future prospects.

Crimley, meanwhile, looked vastly pleased and amused at her imminent downfall. He was a solemn young man with slicked back dark hair, black robes, and a workaholic ethic. The only fun he seemed to enjoy in life was such petty victories as these. Gellert ignored Crimley’s smiles, hoping his first assistant would not slip into an overly familiar attitude with him and forget his own subordinate position. To prevent this, he must make sure Crimley was as terrified of the Minister as he was awed and devoted to serve.

Therefore, he finished his scolding of Juneberry with a last hard, threatening look, until her pale, freckled cheeks turned the same color as her ringlets of bright red hair, and glanced in quick reproval to Crimley’s presumptuous agreement. The proud and ambitious, yet loyal advisor was no safer than any other Ministry worker, should he put a single toe out of line, and he must never be allowed to forget it. In Gellert’s experience, an overabundance of trust was always the recipe for trouble and loss.

A man like him could not have friends. Perhaps he ought to be grateful to Albus for at least teaching him that.

The King had sent several of his top counselors with warm greetings, and then the three visitors were met by the palace butlers and chefs, assured that anything they might need or desire would be at their beckon call throughout their stay.

Gellert supposed the castle was an unusually pretty one, with an ethereal look about it that made an uncomfortable feeling settle in his stomach, unidentifiable, equally unwanted. It leaned too far into the first tendrils of sentimental admiration.

And so he simply waited for all of the usual, generic greetings and explanations to be complete. They were thankfully short and sweet, and then he and his staff were shown to their rooms.

Gellert's quarters appeared to be of the very finest in the whole castle, outside of the King's own chambers. At least, he assumed so, since his employees' rooms had been less than half the size, and it was an absolutely breathtaking room.

He was mercifully left alone for a few hours to "rest" before the royal ball that evening and his upcoming negotiations with the King to form a political bond with "mutual benefits" that would really only benefit Gellert.

His jaw tightened as he sat on the soft bed with its blue velvet blankets and plush pillows, altogether too tempting. Getting too comfortable in a place like this would be a mistake.

And he hated the beautiful paintings of courtly love, knights in shining armor and damsels in distress, hung on the stone walls. The window nearest the bed showed a gorgeous view of the kingdom from high above.

Anyone would be beyond impressed with this place, the greetings they had received, and the kindness of these accommodations. From top to bottom, everything was pure class: the conduct of the nobles and servants, the castle itself, even the townspeople seemed unusually polite for the most part. He had not had so many flowers thrown at him on the whole tour up till now.

Frowning scornfully, he slipped a lingering pink blossom from his silver hair and burned it into oblivion. And then, as with all else that he did lately, he felt absolutely *nothing*. Except he didn't feel that different from the nonexistent flower, his powerful former self secretly smothered so that the fire in him was just a pathetic flicker, and sometimes he felt absolutely put out.

But no one would ever, *ever* know about it.

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One's Royal Duty

"Don't you ever tire of this sort of thing?" Ella asked, yawning as she walked beside her best friend, King Charmont, in the hallway leading from the council chambers to the ballroom. "I

do, and I'm not even…you. Nobody expects anything of me and that suits me very well."

Char laughed, grinning at his friend, pleased at how her melancholy demeanor had shifted to a cheerful and relaxed one after the obedience curse was lifted.

"You deserve a break. A *long* break," he said as they laughed some more, rounding another stone-walled corner which led to a spiral stair, covered in a ruby red carpet. "In which no one *ever* tells you what to do."

Ella's long, glossy brunette hair flounced over her formal, sheer blue cape as she descended, careful not to trip on her pretty heeled shoes. The darker blue skirts of her dress looked like something magical, swirling with gold glitter when she finished the stairs and entered the ballroom.

Char followed soon behind his friend, feeling slightly ridiculous due to the gold hue of his brocade waistcoat, worn over a high-collared white shirt with tightly fitted black trousers. To match the ostentatious-looking vest, he had on a golden cape, decorated with the same admittedly beautiful, hand-sewn design. A tasteful array of neat fleur de lis did nothing to lessen the overly proud and conceited look of the garments, and Char actually blushed whenever he was first seen wearing them at a royal event.

It always felt somewhat absurd. His regular ballroom attire was quite formal and fancy enough, and he was not the sort of king who liked to lord his superior station and power over his subjects or guests from neighboring realms.

But the council did highly recommend and encourage him to follow traditional royal etiquette, and Char's father had worn a similar suit, like all the kings before him. The queens traditionally wore a golden dress of a matching pattern to compliment their husbands', when hosting foreign guests for meetings of a diplomatic nature. But Char had no royal consort to help shoulder the sartorial burden.

"*Strength, accentuated politely but unquestionably, in regality.*" This was a motto regarding the tactic which was written on an old scroll. Wearing this outfit was about making an impression.

Char was working steadily towards updating some of these antiquated habits to reflect a new age, but his main focus in this area was improving relations between his human, elf, fairy and giant subjects. Little annoyances, such as wearing a pretentious outfit to prove Lamia's "power and impressiveness," he could let go of for now.

All eyes were on him when he entered, so he gave a low and gracious bow, smiling at the assembled nobles in their lovely suits and dresses and at the talented group of musicians whom he had hired as official court entertainers.

It had been a condition of Char's search for musicians that they were of diverse origins, dispelling the stereotype that only elves were natural entertainers, or that these various races could never get along.

It was a new age, but the orchestra played the old royal march as Char made his way to the throne, shaking hands with those friends and acquaintances he passed en route. Sitting in his throne, he glanced up at Ella as the music changed to a lively dance song.

“What?” he chuckled, raising his goblet to have a sip of wine.

“It’s just,” Ella grinned from her seat beside him, “You never answered the question. Sooo….?”

“Yes,” Char sighed, “It is a bit…” whispering now, “Tiring, always having to have one’s game face on and constantly turning around to see some new foreign dignitary or other such important stranger with a hand out to be shook, or a low curtsey, or an offering of some bizarre traditional cuisine from their land which you have to sample. If you don’t try it, you’ll seem to be uninterested in peaceful relations or alliance…last month I ate purple eggs. And I’m still not sure what kind of bird they came from, exactly.”

“Perfect! You let some of your frustration out. There, now isn’t that better? I don’t like to see you bottling your feelings up, Char.” Ella offered him a small plate with some cheese, small toast crackers, fruit and nuts. “For goodness sake, eat something. You have a right to get tired of these repetitive, high-pressure events and meetings, as much as anyone else.”

Char accepted the plate of food gratefully. “When did you have time to get this?” he asked, brow furrowed in curiosity.

“Oh, I just loaded a plate up quickly on my way over here,” Ella explained proudly. “I’ve always been good at buffets, probably because my stepmother and stepsisters used to order me to make them each a plate before I ever got to eat. Now, I do it for myself and for my loved ones who would *never* order me about.”

“Thank you, Ella.” Char nibbled on his food. “No sign of our esteemed guests yet.”

The ballroom looked especially splendid, with large flags of Lamia and the Ministry of Magic hanging up. It was a circular room with huge golden pillars, and across the room from Char’s throne, the whole wall was a row of floor to ceiling windows.

The dark blue sky, studded in bright white stars like a scattering of diamonds, surrounded the guests who were already dancing, or else circulating with plates of food from the eclectic buffet, chatting amongst themselves.

Alongside many scrumptious examples of finest Lamian cuisine, the chef had even attempted a few dishes from England, and had gone a further extra mile by learning about Scandinavian cuisine, in tribute to Gellert Grindelwald’s childhood roots at the Durmstrang Institute.

The more he observed the wonderful decorations and food, and watched the guests talking, laughing and dancing, the more frustrated Char felt, realizing that Grindelwald, the guest of honor, was by now a *full hour* late.

“This is unbelievable.” Char frowned. “Imagine being late to your own ball. I’m beginning to think he doesn’t care enough to attend.”

“The Minister has a reputation for arriving ‘fashionably late’ and making a splashy impression on new royal acquaintances,” Ella explained.

Char chewed his cheese and cracker thoughtfully, his blue eyes sparkling with curiosity. “Really?” he asked, politely patting his lips with a cloth napkin before setting the snack aside.

“Didn’t you read up on Gellert Grindelwald?”

“Well, in terms of his leadership and his history, yes, and by reputation the man is a legend. An imposing, but fascinating, mysterious figure.” Char shrugged. “But I didn’t have the time, or quite frankly the energy, to do further research into his *behavioral* patterns. Since he was coming here in person, I assumed we would get to know each other that way. Call me old fashioned.”

“In that case, allow me to catch you up,” Ella said wisely. “I read the entire special issue on Grindelwald in *Lamia Today*. Which I highly recommend. Talk about a good, ahem… *read*…”

“What do you mean, ‘a good, ahem…*read*?’” Char repeated with amusement.

“I mean…because…have you never seen a picture of Grindelwald? He’s *gorgeous,*” Ella said, mouthing the last word dramatically while fanning herself in an elegant style.

There Ella went again, playing would-be matchmaker. She knew Char was a hopeless romantic at heart, so her heart was in the right place when trying to find him a love connection. It just made him shy to hear it spoken of…

Chatting with Ella and remembering to eat had put the natural rosy tint back in his cheeks as he smiled more naturally, without such strain as before. Sometimes, it was as simple as that. He often thought it hadn’t negatively impacted his life at all that he and Ella decided they were better as friends than husband and wife. It was still destined for him to have a wonderful, caring best friend, close as a sister. How could he complain about that?

Did he wish that he had a lover to satiate his rather high daily and nightly…drive? Embarrassingly enough, he very nearly *needed* one. He was sure to wear his hand out soon unless he stopped getting hungrier for lustful encounters the longer he remained single, with no prospect of a spouse in sight. So, yes, he wished it dearly.

Dear because for Char, love was intertwined with sex. That he was so deeply desirous of joining with another’s body and feeling the pleasure of being one only told him he longed for romance, for someone that adored him and with whom he shared a special, incomparable love. Even a love so intense that no one outside of the two of them would be able to understand.

But then, perhaps he’d overindulged in those passionate, illustrated romance novels which he slyly ordered from the village bookshops. His expectations were overblown, and the people were getting impatient for him to take a spouse.

“Really?” he asked after pondering all of this for a few moments. “So, he’s good-looking and likes to arrive late to important events where he is being hosted by royals, all to make a memorable impression? Hmm. Sounds like the good looks come with a hefty serving of ego on the side.”

“Well, I guess you’re right. Honestly, his life story is shrouded in such mystery, I couldn’t find much out, aside from his great magical powers, apparently very high level and extraordinarily rare, and his skills in defending the magical world of his realm against their enemies. The article sort of…spread a small number of facts among rumors and speculation over the pages. That, and there were a lot of glamorous pictures of him. But nobody knows if he has a significant other, although it’s expected he will choose one to forge a foreign alliance, and he’s already visited many kingdoms on this tour.”

“But there are rumors.” Char raised his eyebrows. “The plot thickens.”

“Point being, he is single, so far as anyone knows.” Ella bit her lip and then added playfully, “You sound resolved not to like him already, but sometimes that is the most fertile beginning for true love…”

Char groaned. “Come now, Ella, I don’t need anyone in my life who believes his own showmanship is more important than making a timely and polite arrival at a lavish ball being held in their honor, to welcome them. And that is precisely what Gellert Grindelwald has chosen to do. That sort of boorish egotism is the very opposite of what I find attractive in–”

“Your majesty,” Ella whispered urgently, interrupting his rather haughty, but sincere speech.

Ella never called him that unless she was serious, or unless she was joking around. But she wasn’t smiling. Char’s eyes widened as he gave her a “Gellert Grindelwald is right behind me, isn’t he?” look, his heart squeezing in dread at the social faux pas.

She winced and nodded.

Oh, no. Hell’s bells.

It wasn’t just rude to speak so of his guest, it was embarrassing to be caught by the man himself! How could he have high hopes for forming an alliance if he was going to speak in such a flippant way without looking around to make sure the subject of his disdain was not present to hear it?

Char stood to face the Minister of Magic with a nervous smile, hoping to put all of this behind him, as a silly misunderstanding. Maybe even use it to start off a friendship and healthy road to alliance with a good sense of humor?

But when he turned around, there were piercing eyes staring at him, one dark brown and the other ice blue. Eyes that stopped him in his tracks.

Grindelwald was the most impressive person Char had ever seen, and certainly the handsomest.

His looks took Char's breath away for a moment where he stood staring back at the man feeling even worse about his little rant. But then, that was mainly because Grindelwald gave him such a sharp and judgmental look, making it plain he had heard every word, and obviously taking the whole thing much too seriously. As he reportedly (and apparently!) took *himself* too seriously.

Although uncomfortable with this staring in silence as the band paused between songs, Char felt half-mesmerized by the man's tall, firm, fine figure, with broad shoulders and an obviously muscular physique, pure power simply pouring off his whole demeanor.

He had a stunning face with noble, high cheekbones, and his hair was a very debonair and striking silver-grey, with a single lock of white that…Char did not know why, but it somehow made him even sexier.

"Minister," Char said, breaking the silence awkwardly, since someone had to. "Welcome. It's such an honor to meet you and to host you here in Lamia. I've heard wonderful things about you and your realm."

He put his hand out in greeting, but Gellert bowed down to him on one knee.

"Your royal majesty," Gellert said lavishly.

He looked up, no longer wearing the disapproving expression, but now a condescending smirk. "Forgive me for coming into your *regal and illustrious presence* so very late after the time on the invitation."

"Sir, please," Char sighed, irritated with both the minister and himself. They were certainly off on the wrong foot already!

He went down the short set of steps leading from his throne to the man who was still kneeling before him in sarcastic deference.

Char thought about it for another couple of seconds, then decided to give this measure of sass right back to his "esteemed guest." His rosy cheeks turned red as he did so, but what right had the man to judge him based on an overheard, harmless conversation? After all, Char had apparently not even said anything that wasn't true!

"Thank you for this properly reverent greeting, Mr. Grindelwald," Char said with elaborate, feigned seriousness. "We are prepared to forgive you for the late arrival, given your gracious penitence."

"We?" Ella whispered behind him. Char turned to see her smothering a laugh in her napkin.

He was speaking of himself as "*We,*" which only the most snobbish royals did, while talking as if they and the kingdom itself were one and the same almighty entity.

If Char wasn't much mistaken, Gellert Grindelwald had not expected to have his saucy greeting met with such an eagerly reciprocating response.

Perhaps Grindelwald thought the King would either be impressed, if he were an oblivious ninny, or else angered, if he were smart enough to recognize the fake show of respect and apology.

But that wasn't Char.

The handsome Minister of Magic looked up, still kneeling, and met Char's gaze again, finding confused amusement and a hint of sensuous curiosity which the younger man could not conceal. And a strange feeling of understanding seemed to pass between them, something Char had never felt before. It was like a small lightning strike inside him, making his heart beat faster, this time not from social awkwardness or embarrassment, not even anger or frustration.

This was something else.

It was also notable, if unintended to have this meaning, that Gellert was posed as if he was asking Char to marry him. Char felt almost hyper aware of the fact all of a sudden.

Gellert's smile had softened, as if in spite of himself. "Your majesty is too good to me," he said in a silken voice, allowing Char to hear more of his exotic, compelling accent.

Char shivered. Even if the man had not been so handsome and intriguing, that voice would have attracted him, sight unseen! Deep, throaty and enigmatic, it made the warm feeling of excited, confused agitation grow within him as sweat broke out on his brow. He also (by some odd coincidence) wondered, for the first time that evening, how he looked, hoping he looked the best he possibly could.

And as Char struggled to piece these clues together, landing in a few more moments upon the obvious conclusion which had been the one he'd hoped was not behind his feelings, Gellert smiled more broadly.

The Minister of Magic took Char's hand in his with a warm caress and brushed an even warmer, unmistakably sensual kiss to it. With a soft squeeze, he let Char go and stood up again.

"I'm afraid I hastily spoke an unfair judgment on you, Mr. Grindelwald, and I would..like to apologize for my rudeness."

"Really? Would you, my King? For it seems you were anything but penitent just a minute ago." This, accompanied by the most provoking, teasing smile.

Char sighed. He could not exactly say, "*that was before you knelt and kissed my hand so softly and looked at me as if I was something to eat.*" And he could *not* ask the Minister to come to his bed chambers after the ball, and insist that he make a *prompt* arrival this time.

He considered how he should reply.

The man was a Challenge, personified. He would be hard work for anyone who dared enter into a romance with him, but why was that, too, only making Char feel more baffled and

aroused?

“Your charming deference has changed my disposition towards you to a favorable and wait-and-see one.” Char raised his eyebrows, offering a mischievous smirk of his own.

Char was rather pleased with this speech, as it sounded so much more confidently sassy than he really was. In reality, he was sort of panicked-sassy. Could Gellert – that is, the Minister, *Mr. Grindelwald* – tell?

“In that case, my King, is it possible I might be so remarkably, even unthinkably lucky as to request the pleasure of your company for the next three dances?” Grindelwald, now he was standing again, was a great deal more imposing, in a wildly erotic way to Char’s reeling senses.

His heart skipped a beat and then irrationally decided to gallop even harder, which Char did not appreciate at all. He was already struggling with the butterflies in his stomach and the distinct warmth, a feeling of excited desire in his groin which seemed to keep growing the more he tried to suppress and ignore it.

It was hardly normal etiquette or a social expectation at all for Grindelwald to ask for *three* dances with the King. He was a respected foreign leader, but he was no King.

It was customary in such a case to request one dance, leaving the two remaining places on Char’s dance card to be filled by Grindelwald’s assistant and after that, a duke, duchess or other noble person from among the guests. However, this invitation, this proposition, if accepted, meant that Char would not have time to dance with anyone else but Grindelwald.

He could absolutely tell that Ella was watching in shocked amazement which exceeded her response to any of the romance novels they had traded back and forth, which was really saying something, actually. He could feel it, so he did not turn around to confirm, lest he add another layer of mortification to his fast-growing pile.

Looking at Ella would only make his face a deeper shade of red as she confirmed that *this was all really happening.*

“I do hope your majesty does not think me overly forward and presumptuous in requesting so much of your time.” Gellert gave him a cocky look that made it clear he knew how aroused and anxious the younger man was, and was proud of evoking the response.

Even his ego, the more Char heard him speak and watched the fluctuation of self-important, confident looks on his gorgeous face, the sparkling mystique and playful sexiness in his unique eyes, made him more attractive. But why? He’d been completely sincere when telling Ella a mere five minutes ago that Grindelwald was the opposite of “his type.”

“I am aware it is not exactly the usual etiquette. Are you inclined to be generous with me once again, my King, and give me a chance to prove my friendship a worthy one?” With an amicable chuckle and the very devil in his eyes he added, “I’ve been told before that I am a fairly good dancer.”

Right. I'm willing to bet that's a serious understatement.

Char was keenly aware that the sound of this man's voice seemed powerful enough to strip the clothes from his body as effectively as a spell might do. However, it was a mistake to begin considering all the sinfully delicious ways in which Grindelwald might use his magical abilities (so unusually strong and skilled!) in a sexual situation.

He felt slightly dizzy and was worried about making a royal fool of himself, on top of not knowing if it was right or wise to accept the offer.

"A king like you should not second-guess himself, if you don't mind my saying," Grindelwald murmured, the comment meant only for Char as he moved slightly closer.

He was so much larger than Char, and about twenty years older; the naughtiness of the differences between them was now even more apparent. Gellert's heady scent, woodsy, smoky, and flecked in fruit and herb fragrances of his own magical realm which Char did not even recognize, was potently seductive.

The younger man was close to actually getting an erection, but there was no chance he could turn Grindelwald down and miss out on a chance to have three whole dances with this man's arms around him…!

"I'm not second-guessing myself, Minister," Char answered, feigning boldness, though he did enjoy their flirtation. "Simply questioning why it is a man like you would choose to have only one partner at an event full of eligible and intriguing prospects."

"Perhaps, then, you would be best served in your curiosity by investigating the matter. Allow me to show you the nature of my interest, my King."

Char was amazed. He and Grindelwald, within minutes of meeting, already spoke to each other fluently in a flirtatious language of their own. He knew that anyone listening would only understand a small percentage of what they communicated: a mutual desire to know each other better which had surprised them both with its depth, and which had aroused them to equal measure.

"Minister," Char smiled, looking as wonderfully perplexed as he felt. "I accept your kind offer."

With that, as many in the room observed with interest, the Minister of Magic took King Charmont's hand in his own. It felt distinctly as if Char's hand belonged there, clasped possessively in Grindelwald – Gellert's – large, strong hand.

The King found himself led along to the dance floor by his partner's guiding touch, soon transferred to the small of Char's back, a touch which was entirely unnecessary and skirted the very edge of impropriety.

He felt another jolt of hot desire and excited butterflies, and he wanted Gellert to touch him, there and everywhere, over and over, possibly never to stop. It was all nonsense, of course. Since when did this sensible king believe in love at first sight? That was one issue.

Another matter concerned him more, as Gellert led him into the dance with the very same ease and talent he apparently applied to everything. Every move that he made, every word he spoke seemed magically perfect in its smooth surface and the beautiful, complicated nuances that lay beneath, all of them darker, some of them even broken.

The problem with all this, of course, was that along with the dizzying feelings of lust and fascination, he knew instinctively this man was indeed trouble, that Gellert was accustomed to take what he wanted and talk his way out of far more serious offenses than showing up late to a ball.

Char wondered if Gellert used his magic liberally when it came to taking what he wanted and conquering his enemies. His perhaps more menacing qualities, which Char sensed on him as an animal scents out and gets to know their mate without needing to speak, were tempered so eloquently in his irrefutable charm, but just how dark *was* his dark side?

And yes, these considerations, as Gellert swayed with him on the dance floor, their bodies immediately moving together just right, the same way their hands fit together, also only made him feel more drawn to the man – to his continued shock.

Chapter 2

Dream violin

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Gellert was truly shocked for the first time in many years when he set eyes on the young King. At first, he was genuinely offended by the high-handed and rude way the boy insulted him before even meeting him. Perhaps part of that was because Char seemed to cut right to his lesser qualities in a way that made Gellert feel uncharacteristically small. Repressing the feeling, he had intended a cold greeting, but no sooner was it bestowed than he got his first good look at the face and figure which accompanied the sassy, noble voice.

He had never seen a face more beautiful, lips which were obviously made to be kissed countless times, sucked and bitten. It was a trying experience, dancing with the boy without surrendering to his desires. How he would love to demonstrate just how pleasing he could be, just how much he could be Charmont's "type," by devouring his sweet lips in so many kisses they were swollen as the boy leaned helplessly against him.

Then, Char would be absolutely in his thrall, no magic needed. The magic could wait until they were alone. There were so many ways he could use his skills to undress the King in manners he was quite certain the boy had never expected or previously known of.

But repress all of this he did, as well, for it was necessary. Having heard of the boy's handsomeness before coming here, he had vaguely toyed with the idea of seducing him and enjoying a few nights of entertaining pleasure. This idea included the notion of leaving Char immediately afterwards, but in such a way as did not endanger their diplomatic relationship. Scrolls confirming their upcoming official decisions could be drawn up and signed, guaranteeing it was all ironclad, before Gellert uncorked his lust and took the boy apart with the darkest ecstasies.

There was a problem in his heart, tugging at it as he guided the boy in the first few dances, for every time their hands brushed, he felt fire under his skin. When they looked into each other's eyes, Gellert found a clever willingness to go along with his every mischievous scheme and give him a run for his galleons as well.

Had he finally met his match? It was impossible, it must be.

Look what had happened with Albus. He had been emotionally destroyed by their split, by Albus turning his back on Gellert. Losing the understanding and affection, losing the respect of the man he loved and believed to be his soulmate was an experience he simply could not offer his heart up to again.

It will be fine. I will go along with my original plan to bed the King. I deserve to relax after such a tiresome tour up till now. Once I have sated my desire for his body, I am sure my fascination will dwindle, as it always does after a trifling affair.

However, Gellert's delightfully selfish and cruel plan seemed to be a castle built of sand, doomed to be knocked over by those surprisingly fierce tides he saw in Char's ocean eyes. He could be enveloped in all that blue, drowned in it where he had sought to conquer, if he were not very careful.

While listening to the boy's words, he noticed Char was incredibly wise for his years. He had clever remarks about all sorts of matters, from the political to the personal, and he was almost astoundingly open about discussing anything at all, while never once losing his regal dignity.

Gellert felt himself slipping deeper into a baffling whirlpool, a strange infatuation which he should be altogether too mature and fortified to feel, much less to be taken in by.

Char asked him, "How do you like Lamia so far?"

"Lamia," Gellert smiled, "Is the most beautiful place I have ever seen."

He said this while gazing at Char, looking from those intoxicating eyes to his rosebud lips. Of course, the boy could not doubt his true meaning, but although he blushed most becomingly, he did not melt into bashful and infatuated looks as Gellert had expected.

It was the last dance of the night, and as had been the case for at least an hour, all eyes in the room were busily observing the fetching new (possible) couple, wondering if it would be their fate to have the Minister of Magic as King Char's royal consort.

The consensus was that he and Char were dazzling together, that they danced beautifully, and that if a romance were indeed brewing, Gellert Grindelwald "had better treat our King well, or he will be hearing from all the people."

Easy as it was to pick up on the barely-stifled gossip, Gellert put it aside with an uncomfortable feeling, focusing on the King who felt so firm, supple and warm in his arms. Char's heart seemed so soft, but his will was remarkably strong.

Gellert had a difficult time not admiring him on an even envious level. Certainly no one who worked under him felt as Char's subjects did; all of the high opinions and trusting views he had earned through various schemes and manipulations were not the same as Char and his honest, hard work and moral scruples.

"I wish to know what you truly think about our kingdom from what you have truly seen of it thus far, Minister, not what you consider to be effective flirtation," Char laughed. But it was a gentle laugh, showing a vulnerable side that told Gellert the flirtation had not fallen on deaf ears.

"I've seen almost nothing of your doubtless very fair and impressive lands, your majesty." Gellert shrugged with a more calculating smile. "But I have heard such wondrous tales of the magic which lives in your kingdom's air, soil, wildlife and people. I confess I am fascinated and hungry to learn more. To see more for myself. Alas, since arriving I have merely seen your glorious castle inside and out, and spent most of the day resting after travel, then consulting with my advisors. By the time that was done…"

“Oh, by then it was time to make a suitably splashy, late entrance at this ball,” Char noted with a sly smile.

His grip tightened slightly on Gellert’s hand when the older man held his waist more firmly. Gellert’s stomach swooped and Char’s eyes grew brighter as he bit his lip.

“Yes,” Gellert murmured distractedly.

He cleared his throat, turning with the boy in a traditional, easy dance that let them remain close and able to converse. The music was charming, some of it consisting of instruments Gellert knew well from his own world, some introducing to his ears sparkling, immersive sounds he had never known.

The songs the band played were sentimental and sweepingly romantic, yet never cloying. Gellert disliked the way the strings and woodwinds in particular got underneath his skin with subtle beauty.

This boy, too, intoxicated more than the free-flowing wine of this fine royal occasion could ever aspire. Charmont smelled of fresh-cut roses and beguiling exotic fruit, ripe and bursting with sweetness which Gellert fancied he could nearly taste on his tongue.

“Why are you really interested in forming an alliance with Lamia?” Char inquired, his brow cutely crinkled.

There was no getting a trick past this boy, Gellert sighed, or certainly no common and easy one. He would have to work hard if he still intended to use and deceive this young beauty.

“Because we both have something of value to share with each other,” Gellert suggested in a husky tone.

Char’s expression remained stubbornly skeptical of him, with some other glimmer on the cusp of softer inclinations that had not yet broken free of his own careful control.

“I think…you wish to profit from learning about our magic, so that you can apply its qualities to the great powers you have already accrued and which have apparently catapulted you to the height of governmental command.”

“Have you any objections?” Gellert asked. “I am willing to trade any knowledge or resources from my own realm which you may consider fair in exchange.”

Char relented slightly, shifting that lovely hand in Gellert’s confident hold, but never attempting to escape the older man’s touch. A touch which could not be mistaken as casual, friendly or platonic.

Their bodies and faces were close as propriety would allow, and it would be a simple, brief and fluid movement to dip his head slightly and devour those lips, to squeeze this stunning boy’s tight little body to his own larger, stronger one in a crushing grip. The temptation and imagery inspired by it were so shockingly satisfying, Gellert could scarcely keep a clear head.

Char answered sensibly. “I have no objections, sir, only reservations. We could certainly use the military alliance and even the advice from someone of your experience in defense. If I learned anything from observing my father’s perhaps too-passive and naive rule of the kingdom, it is that even the kindest heart must fortify itself from ruthless invaders. He made it easy for my Uncle to deceive him and even send the whole country into a nosedive of prejudice from which I still work to raise us all back up. While we don’t know of any foreign threats, nor any new internal ones, I would vastly prefer to be ready in case any suddenly reveal themselves. Even to conduct regular investigations into any associates and anyone within my own royal cabinet of advisors who may possibly become corrupted.”

“What a speech, my King,” Gellert remarked. “I feel ill-equipped to fully understand your paranoia, based on the scant hints you have provided. I’m also afraid we had only the most basic and dated information about the workings of your kingdom prior to this visit. Part of the reason for our presence, in addition to the obvious benefit to us both, is to better understand who we are dealing with. And yet, I find myself even more compelled to know of your majesty’s own life and its apparently hard-earned lessons, those which have formed such a hardy near-expectation of betrayal.”

“*Betrayal,*” Char said quietly, intent on Gellert’s mysterious gaze, as if his own searching eyes would steal the secrets therein. “Is a fact of life, Mr. Grindelwald. I’m not being paranoid; I’m showing good common sense.”

The music ended, but not so the fire between them, for which every word and look stoked the flames; their shared touches were nearly unbearable. Yet not to touch Charmont was worse.

Gellert swallowed hard, strangely affected by the young King’s anguish regarding the past.

Char stepped back from him and reluctantly they let go of each other, exchanging another confused but irresistible moment of eye contact.

Gellert found himself smiling softly, a smile he had not bestowed in longer than he could rightly recall. “My dear, lovely King. It would be as easy for me to confess that I conduct my life with the same attitude. My senses, always attuned to any potential betrayal, my retaliatory methods honed to the sharpest point. I find that I seldom rest, if I may be so honest with you.”

“Please do,” Char said. “I’m surprised, but delighted to find such honest common ground.”

“Not nearly so surprised as I, your majesty, in finding myself entirely honest in this moment with you.”

“I have to…” Char glanced around the room, where servants were collecting dishes and cups as the musicians packed up.

The beautiful King looked torn between odd disappointment that a ball begun with such awkwardness between them should now end, and a desire to extend their time together (perhaps that chafed against the boy’s accompanying instinct for self-protection; Gellert did not have the most immediately wholesome, trustworthy visage, to say the least).

“I have to bid farewell to our guests,” Char smiled, and the way he said “our” almost seemed to imply they were bidding a goodnight to their guests, as if they were a couple.

Gellert nodded, leaning into the feeling. Surely, a harmless infatuation on his end that would be easy to “cure” by a sound bedding of the pretty boy and a brisk departure thereafter.

“But then…would you join me for an evening ride – ah! That is,” Char rushed on with crimson cheeks, “An evening ride of us on *horses,* em, touring the local countryside? I can show you more of what Lamia has to offer, but more than that…what can be absorbed through the senses, appreciated and…what may lift one’s spirits.”

“I would be delighted and honored to undertake such an expedition with you.”

Gellert gave him a small, playful smile, having thoroughly enjoyed the funny, but heartfelt little explanation.

“Really?” Char looked pleasantly startled.

Did he truly think Gellert was capable of resisting such an invitation? Perhaps, then, Gellert’s own baffling jumble of emotions were not so obvious as he had feared.

Quickly the boy continued, “I mean, of course, very well.”

Char added to the latest endearing stream of babble by putting his hands on his hips, then crossing them, then putting them behind his back. “I just, uh, I need to bid farewell to…and then speak to the servants, eh, about the horses, and um…do you have one? Did you bring one with you?”

“What?” Gellert said, repressing a laugh.

“A horse,” Char clarified.

“No.”

“Ah. In that case, I shall have one readied for you. We have many beautiful ones and I will make sure you are well looked after, of course. So, would you be willing to meet me in the palace gardens, say in half an hour?”

“I would be willing.” Gellert wrestled unsuccessfully with the tingling in his skin, the happy thump of a heart learning how to work again.

How to respond to genuine excitement for spending time with someone, irrespective of greed and lies (the latter kept slipping from his mind)?

“I shall see you soon, your majesty. Thank you for a remarkable evening thus far. I hope I did not appear so ungrateful as to obscure my pleasure in this wonderful ball.”

“Not at all, you have been quite charmingly enthusiastic, ever since I remarked upon your rudeness and prompted you to snap into shape for me.” Char’s eyes sparkled. His soft cheeks flushed at his boldness.

Gellert longed to give him a good spanking, and to hold him afterwards, massaging his reddened, gorgeous ass with the sweetest affirmations.

For now, he kissed the King's hand again with a low bow, his lips lingering even longer on the pale, smooth skin than before.

"Half an hour," Gellert agreed as Char nervously walked off, both of them smiling and yet criticizing themselves, each time they could manage to, for acting in such a bizarre manner.

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2. A secret garden

Gellert waited in the palace gardens for his King to emerge, as if he was the hero in some idiotic Muggle fairy tale; absurd, given that he was quite literally the evil villain archetype, live and in person!

Foolish and doting words kept flitting about his brain, which felt so empty otherwise as to give him a frightening, pleasant floating sensation.

It had nothing to do with magic and everything to do with King Charmont of Lamia.

Adorable, cute, sweet, pet, good boy, and worst of all, my boy pulsed in his heartbeat, remaining thankfully unspoken even when they bubbled up in his throat. Could he survive the rest of this night with Char and not surrender to the urge to speak these words?

The vocabulary of love should disgust him, should remind him of Albus and why he did not do this anymore. But there was something so different about Char; he was even more purely moral and driven to simple goodness than Albus. Yet a certain brokenness in his wide, sapphire eyes spoke to the one in Gellert's own mismatched gaze, and what ought to clash seemed to match.

He got the unacceptable notion that Char would never be repulsed by him, would not choose to run from him, defy and betray him. Char had a darkness at his core that was the ability to desire someone dangerous, but along with it, could he love that monster eternally?

Or would he tire of Gellert and his wicked machinations all too soon? That was the pattern, after all.

"Minister," Charmont greeted him, appearing from behind Gellert, breaking through the gloomy clouds of Gellert's mind like a bright ray of sunshine. He was leading one shiny brown horse while a servant had brought a black stallion for Gellert. "Shall we?"

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The horses were absolutely stunning, and so was every inch of magical country they traveled. Sometimes they galloped, letting the vast, clear, starry sky overhead seem as endless as it was for once, and feeling the thrill of the air speeding past, rifling their hair. At other times, they would slow to a canter and then ride alongside one another, talking.

Char thought that Gellert was the most stunning thing in a vivacious evening full of adventures he hadn't seen coming.

"Tell me more about how magic works in your world?" the King asked curiously as they stopped the horse to rest by the river.

Gellert held a hand out, assisting Char to climb down from the horse. This was entirely unnecessary and far too enjoyable. The merest touch of those large, strong hands on his smaller, softer ones was a bit of a prelude, suggesting what their bodies might be like together. And it was sending lightning down Char's spine that made it clear he certainly had fallen head-first into a silly crush on the man.

I'll get past it soon enough. Keep him talking, he's sure to show some vital flaw that diffuses the foolish feelings.

They sat by the river's edge, strangely comfortable when so near to one another, except for the thunderous beat of Char's heart.

"In my world," Gellert mused, running a finger over the surface of the water so that ripples flowed out in his wake. "One is born a witch or wizard, or indeed one is not. In such a case, the person is a No-Maj or Muggle."

"To be born without magic," Char sighed, "How odd and dreadful. I can't imagine not having magic all around me. Little as I've cultivated my own abilities, they are obviously there, easily accessible should the desire arise."

Gellert sneered, "I have no pity for an entire class of human beings who are so vastly inferior, and yet spend most of their time discriminating against us when not stealing our rightful properties, jailing or institutionalizing us. In the best of scenarios, Muggles are simply in the way."

Char's heart sank at such harsh words, but the feeling of yearning for Gellert did not diminish as he might have expected. The older man's simmering darkness only compelled him more deeply. But of course, he must not allow his own moral compass to be misdirected from Gellert's heady influence.

"Prejudice has done no end of damage to Lamia," he answered steadily. "Do you really believe your kind are superior, though you are all human?"

"My ancestors were hung, burned at the stake, accused of devil worship, and the Muggles had worse forms of torture and execution. Those who were hung were the lucky witches. And Muggles have only become less overt in their campaign to purge the world of magic. They either live oblivious to the magical world, or learn of it somehow and then invariably dedicate themselves to our destruction."

"That's awful, Gellert," Char frowned. "I've seldom heard of violence quite that bad here in my kingdom."

Gellert gave him a complicated smile, looking so much older than Char in that moment, and even more attractive for the friction of their differences.

“This is an innocent land.” Gellert looked up at the stars and back to Char, a deep breath in and out accompanying his slight movements. “Yet you have developed a wary attitude towards potential foes.”

“My Uncle,” Char said. He still almost choked on Edgar’s name, it was so hard thinking about what had happened. “Killed my father, murdered him in cold blood for the throne. By the time I found out, my best friend Ella nearly paid the ultimate price for my blind and feather-headed trust. I myself almost died when a poisoned crown was commissioned by my Uncle to ensure he went from Regent to King proper through my untimely demise.”

“You weren’t feather-headed,” Gellert insisted, surprising him. “He was family. You’d lost your father.” He looked incredibly angry on Char’s behalf. “Of course you leaned on the family you had left, and naturally he would have been the last one you expected to betray you.”

“I think you know something about betrayal from a person very close to you.” Char stated this, no need to ask.

“I wear such past resentments on my sleeve without meaning to,” Gellert shrugged. “Yes.” He looked at their reflections in the starry water. “I know all about it.”

Their hands shifted instinctively closer on the soft, dark grass between their bodies, not much space at all now. The night was warm, but nowhere near enough to account for the sweat on Char’s brow and the palms of his hands.

“In my world,” Char murmured, batting his lashes in a sultry, yet thoughtful manner, “Magic is like breathing. Spells are different here, spells that you might cast in your realm would have entirely different qualities to them. You and your staff must be very careful about practicing your magic here.”

“Combining our two worlds’ forms of magic must only be undertaken at first in an experimental capacity,” Gellert nodded, looking at Char’s lips in a way that belied the subject matter.

“We can make arrangements tomorrow,” Char offered, hypnotized by the enigmatic, seductive wizard.

“And we may discuss our armed forces and national resources, to solidify the alliance.”

If Char was not mistaken, “alliance” had become a euphemism by this point. They were thinking about a joining, but not exactly of their kingdoms.

Char scooted just a little closer. Oh, by all the *stars*, Gellert Grindelwald was a devastatingly handsome, dangerously irresistible man.

The Minister of Magic still wore his tux, but had undone the collar, so it was left open, showing his gorgeous throat. The bow tie hung loose, too, and Gellert's hair now fell over his forehead, making him look even more sensuous and touchable.

Char himself had changed out of his somewhat embarrassing ball apparel and now wore a loose white shirt and tight tan riding pants, his curls wild from the breeze.

Gellert's eyes were all over the younger man's new outfit, but they stayed just as often on Char's own gaze, or on his lips, until they seemed to burn feverishly in response.

"You seem as if you're tense a lot of the time," Char noted softly. "Are you beginning to relax yet?" Self-conscious, he rushed to add, "Have we made you feel at home in Lamia?"

"If I feel at home here, my King, it is because of you, and only you." Gellert traced Char's jaw slowly, drawing a low gasp from the younger man.

Gellert's gaze darkened as he probably realized Char was extremely touch-starved, and most likely possessed an unusually active sex drive. Char could not hide either one of these factors as he leaned into that warm caress from such a beautiful hand.

"Does no one touch you, lovely one?"

Char trembled and shook his head. "Aside from hugging Ella now and then or shaking hands with my people, simple greetings and such…no. I'm afraid my subjects tend to treat me like glass, as if I am both too high above them to be reached, or even if they could, I am too pure, too breakable."

"Do you wish you could be touched more often?" Gellert turned his hand, running the back of it down Char's hot, blushing cheek, then the length of his neck. Admiration and desire blazed in his eyes. "Do you dream about a lover's touch?"

"Yes, I do," Char whispered, biting back a moan as Gellert stroked his hair firmly.

He had a commanding touch and wildfire in his gaze.

Gellert closed the distance between them and sealed his lips to Char's. The fusion of their slow-moving mouths felt like heaven; how could Char help opening to the man and letting their tongues meet?

The wizard had both hands holding Char where he wanted him, one wrapped around his curls and the other cupping his face. Neither touch was precisely gentle, rather commanding, actually; yet Gellert's kiss was endlessly sensuous, tantalizing.

When their lips parted for the sake of breathing, they smiled at each other with a sense of shared mischief that made hot need pool in Char. "Try a little magic," he beckoned sweetly, "Something small."

Gellert's eyes twinkled as he cast a spell, silent and motionless, unlike the manner in which Char had heard wizards did magic in his world. No incantations and no wand.

A crown of fresh, divinely lush flowers immediately appeared, nestled in Char's mussed curls. "Oh," he murmured, leaning over as Gellert released him so that he could admire his reflection in the river.

"It's so beautiful," Char murmured, touching the bright blue and violet blossoms. "Thank you."

"Do you know what is different?" Gellert inquired. He stroked Char's curls, then played lightly with the floral headband, admiring his handiwork. "I only cast a spell to place a single flower behind your ear. This is so much better."

Clasping Char's face again, he rubbed the younger man's jawline, then caressed his ear. Without another word, he lowered the King to the ground so that Char was laid out for him with Gellert on top, his lips tickling Char's with warm breath.

Char was speechless with a strange burst of emotion and lust, staring into Gellert's eyes, his lips slightly parted and his breaths coming too quickly, heart beating far too fast.

"This is how I see you," Gellert smiled, "Part of nature's enchantment, a lovely nymph, infusing countless temptations with my blood."

He traced Char's lips and pressed the lower one with the pad of his thumb. This carried an unmistakably erotic meaning that made Char moan, shyly kissing Gellert's finger, not bold enough yet to lick or suck it though he wanted to.

Now, Char could see that Gellert noticed his inner conflict on the subject and it made the King blush deeply.

"You're *stunning,*" Gellert told him emphatically. "Has another kissed you, my King?"

"Only – Ella, before we decided to just be friends instead of marrying."

"I see." Unaccountable jealousy flickered in the man. "That is your little friend with the brunette hair, who sits so near your throne."

"By now, we're like brother and sister," Char explained, confused and even more aroused by Gellert's possessive look. "Ella actually encouraged me to consider you as a, well, as a romantic prospect."

Gellert looked at him coyly, raising his eyebrows and smirking. "Oh? Indeed?"

"Yes, I–" Char's doubtless brilliant reply was swallowed up by another kiss, hot and demanding where the first one had been warm and searching.

Out of his depths, but euphoric, Char clung to Gellert, feeling the broadness and strength of his back, his shoulders, the powerful muscles in his arms. The King's hands wandered all over. This fired Gellert up even more, so that he licked deep into Char's mouth, then bit and sucked at his lip, growling at Char's shocked moans.

"Did it feel like *this,*" Gellert demanded intensely, "Kissing Ella?"

He was momentarily breathless, vigorous desire pulsing so wildly in him that Char could not doubt it for a moment. The older man's cock was hard and nudged against Char's thigh, and it felt immense.

"No," Char sighed, "It felt nothing like this. You do not kiss me gently, Gellert."

"No. And I *cannot* kiss you gently. Do you object?"

"N-no–"

"Has another laid you down? Threatened your virtue this boldly?"

Gellert's eyes were so full of wicked, dark humor that Char's body responded in more soft, delicate weakness. As if he would let this man do anything at all to him.

"Never."

"And yet, you have hungered for it day and night. I think you are so often hard, just like this," Gellert reached down confidently and cupped his hand over the hard line of Char's erection.

The King arched his back and fought the nearly overpowering need to thrust against Gellert. He gasped, "Please, I…"

"Mmm. I can feel it." Gellert stroked him firmly. "Don't rut, pet. This won't be over for you so quickly, nor with such mercy. I think you are so often hard like this that it is painful. And you've found no relief but from your own pretty hand, have you?"

Char had pouted at the order not to rub against Gellert's hand, even as the slow, expert stroking made him feverishly desperate to do so. But now, the wizard's words drew a playful smile from him.

"Why do I doubt that you would offer me relief?"

Gellert's hand stopped. "Tell me if I'm right."

"You are," Char mumbled wildly, "Please, I can't control myself, your hand feels so good, your body, I want you to kiss me and touch me, Gellert."

Gellert growled again. "You are *provoking*, Charmont, deeply provoking."

He passionately kissed Char's neck, then bit him and did not bother staying below the collar line. It was obvious he was marking Char as if placing a claim, and while that was insane, and it would be embarrassing to appear in court with large kiss bruises on his neck, again Char melted. He let Gellert do just as he pleased. It all simply felt too good to deny, especially to give in and feel the power of this handsome, brilliant, perilous man's need for him.

Char had never felt so beautiful.

Gellert pulled Char's shirt open and kissed his chest, still slowly and firmly stroking the boy over his pants. "I don't offer relief. I would consume you. You will die and be reborn, reshaped and moulded in my hands. You won't recognize yourself nor the things I make you feel. How I long to corrupt you, my good, pure little King. I doubt you comprehend–" He hissed as Char grew even harder under his touch and between hot, wet kisses on the pale, smooth skin of his chest, where no one had ever kissed him before. "What depravities I would take out on this beautiful body."

Char's eyes rolled back as Gellert licked and sucked at his nipples with the very same commanding, slow firmness that he used to stroke the boy.

"Gellert!" he cried, the sound echoing in the otherwise abandoned field. "Dear me, I– oh, by the Gods, Gellert–"

The minister had bitten down on each sensitive, hard nipple, and when Char choked out such hapless pleas, he smiled wickedly. "Lovely, decadent thing. You look so perfect, debauched by me in the grass, flowers nestled in your pretty curls. You're so wet, I can feel it…I would have you anytime I felt like it, if you were mine. You would wait upon my beckon call and my every whim. Obey me. And I will crush you, destroy you, break you open with pleasure."

"Then," Char sighed, trailing his shaking hands down Gellert's body, then shyly finding the older man's cock and rubbing it in time with how Gellert stroked him, "Perhaps you had better get started…"

Gellert moaned huskily, then his patience seemed to snap, as if cut by the knife's edge of Char's words, his innocent touch on Gellert's throbbing cock, his complete, baffled surrender.

He hurriedly undid both their trousers and pushed them down, then mounted Char again and pressed their cocks directly together. The King whimpered at the pleasurable sensation, the sinful shock of their most intimate parts, hot, hard and dripping against each other. It was true, he had never even imagined such debauchery, had understood relatively little of the act of love and nothing at all of what Gellert was doing now – !

"*Ah!* For goodness sake, Gellert, what are you – oh, *gods,* please…"

"Your sweet, innocent little exclamations," Gellert smirked, starting to grind into Char so that their cocks slid and dragged together easily. "Are doing all manner of things to me, pet."

Char became aware, as he pressed his fingers tightly into Gellert's back and felt his rhythmic motions, his lover had done another spell, as in addition to the copious precum they shared in this raunchy, surprising manner, there was certainly lubricant slicking the glide of their cocks, too. And it felt. *Unbelievable.*

"That's it, naughty boy. Letting me have you in the open, the first night of our acquaintance…whatever has come over you?" Gellert's words were made threadbare by the gritty, hoarse tone of his voice, worn thin with his own shocking pleasure.

"*You* have," Char moaned. "Gellert, it feels so good, I can't believe it…you're so…"

“Yes?” Gellert kissed his lips and stared at him, smiling devilishly again.

“You’re so *big*, so good, perfect,” Char struggled to keep his focus enough to find words while also striving to hold off his orgasm as it kept roaring closer. “You could make me come like this.”

“And you,” Gellert bit Char’s ear lightly then his neck much harder, before wrapping his hand tight on the boy’s curls and thrusting faster against him. “Are going to make me come like this. How scandalous, your majesty…”

“Does that mean I’m allowed to come?” Char batted his lashes, which were dotted in tears, and his look was so vulnerably honest, absent from any calculation and dependent entirely on Gellert, it undid the older man.

“Yes,” Gellert groaned, snapping his hips sharply and fucking down against Char with such ruthless, precise expertise that their wet, slick cocks moved together to perfection, even better than before. “Yes, pet, you may come…”

That was all Char had to hear. Gellert grabbed his hands roughly and pinned him hard to the grassy earth, rutting against Char with more wanton grunts and moans, his hair falling into his eyes, teeth bared with the exquisite torment of his bliss. Char stopped trying not to come, and within another three fast strokes of Gellert’s weeping cock against his own, he shuddered into a molten orgasm.

“Great Gods,” Char gasped, then let out a high-pitched moan that should be embarrassing, but wasn’t because it made Gellert thrust against him even faster and bite his neck harder.

Char spilled, hot and sticky between them, and it seemed to be the final straw for Gellert, who tugged the King’s hair sharply and released onto his sweaty, writhing young body.

“You’re a very, very good little King, and a bad boy, aren’t you, Charmont? My pet.” Gellert put his hand around them both and stroked their cocks together more firmly than ever, making their orgasms go on longer than Char thought they really *should,* as the quivers of unbearable ecstasy began to prick at him with the needles of oversensitive twinges.

Even the pain was addictive. Gellert kept stroking them until he’d milked both completely, until they were soaked in each other’s seed and he was planting kiss after fierce, filthy kiss on Char’s red and swollen lips.

When he let go of their cocks, he wrapped his arms around Char and rolled them over, so that Char was on top as they went on kissing like madmen. Gellert’s big hands shot to Char’s plump, round ass and kneaded his cheeks, massaging and groping.

“Every inch of you, perfection.” He fed the compliment to Char on another hungry kiss.

“And you,” Char answered breathlessly, “I love your hands on me, your mouth…your body, Gellert…”

“That’s evident, my King.” Gellert grinned at him, highly pleased, and deserved a slap, but Char felt his heart squeeze with affection, too.

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Gellert had no trouble in cleaning them speedily, until there was no sign of their wanton frollicking by the river, save for the crown of flowers on Char’s head and the shining, deliciously sore bruises on his soft, long neck. He even fixed the areas of grass and yellow wildflowers which Char had yanked right out of the earth as he was pleasured to within an inch of his young life.

“I’m trying to think of something to say to you,” Char admitted, blushing, fumbling for words.

The situation was completely improper, so far out of bounds he was shocked that his shame was arousing him this way. The severity of such scandal was beyond anything Char had fantasized even in his sexiest morning masturbating dreams, where he let himself linger between sleep and waking with a hand lazily stroking himself while images of obscene pleasure cascaded through his wild imagination.

“Perhaps only this,” Gellert proposed, cupping his face. “Do you regret it?”

Char’s brow furrowed. Could Gellert even doubt it for a moment? And yet should he say as much, after exposing his royal virtue and placing the secret of it in the hands of this…almost a stranger, with such darkness lurking under his skin and pouring from his possessive stare?

What had he done? And yet, Char would give almost anything to start kissing Gellert again and let the man strip him naked to do even more debauched things to him. He was tired of thinking, especially when he *felt* this much.

He opened his mouth, having decided to let whatever came out of it suffice, however awkward the improvised words might be.

Gellert tilted his head, watching him attentively.

And then, they were interrupted as abruptly as they had allowed their passion to explode.

A guard from the palace rode up to them at a gallop, stopped and entreated Char with frightened eyes.

“Your majesty! There’s been an attack in the royal court. I scarcely know– how to tell you…”

“Robert,” Char soothed authoritatively. He nodded at the man, a bearded knight not much older than himself. “It’s alright. You must tell me, as bluntly as you possibly can.”

“Very well, sire. Your royal taster is dead, poor lad. I’m grieved to say he was testing the food which the chefs had prepared for your majesty’s breakfast.”

“For *breakfast?*” Char reeled in shock and sadness at the news of such a murder, the death of an innocent and one of his own servants. He hadn’t even realized that the night had ended

somewhere in the middle of the impetuous tryst he and Gellert had shared.

Sure enough, the sun was peeking over the horizon and he saw some of the giants from the village nearby marching off towards the farmlands, ready to begin a new work day.

“Whoever this vile culprit was, they meant to assassinate you, my King,” Gellert broke in, making Char realize he couldn’t care less about any part of the terrible news except for this.

Already, Char was getting better at understanding Gellert’s microexpressions and subtle body language tells. He seemed urgently concerned, as anyone could see, but only Char noticed that Gellert had a murderous rage storming through his demeanor.

“It’s true, your majesty,” said Robert with a sad nod. “There can’t be any doubt.”

“A poisoning,” Char mused, “My uncle used to kill by poisoning. It’s how he tried to kill me at my coronation. Who would be so cruel?”

“Come with me, there’s no time to waste,” Gellert muttered by his side. “We’ll hunt down whoever did this and make sure they pay.”

Char realized that by speaking low, for his ears only, the older man was hiding that he was basically ordering the King what to do.

“Robert, can you and your men bring the horses?” Char said with too many confused stresses warring in his mind and perceptions.

“Of course, your majesty, but–”

Robert’s words were cut off as suddenly, the King and the Minister of Magic vanished into thin air, apparated by Gellert back to the palace.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

cw: some gruesome violence in this chapter, but not directed at anyone we *like*...

1. freeing each other

Gellert and Char appeared within the palace and immediately shot into action. In fact, Gellert had to catch Char by the shoulders when the King was so desperate to help with the investigation of the tragic murder, he failed to realize apparating would make him dizzy and nauseous.

“My King, stay a moment,” Gellert murmured, massaging Char’s shoulders. “Breathe.”

He wished to add,*I have you*, but held the words inside him as he feared them, if they turned out to be untrue later. Having had so much of Char already, not possessing the boy fully would break him if he let himself keep wandering towards the edge of the cliff between sanity and love.

Now was the time to put his walls back up and be businesslike. If only his heart did not care about the miserable expression on the face of this sweet young king.

“How can I?” Char asked fiercely, not angry, but horrified with what had occurred in his absence, “How can I breathe when Ned breathes no more, in my place?”

He charged towards the dining room, where the body was still kept as it was originally found less than an hour ago, sprawled on the ornate rug beside the table. A series of silver platters covered with round domes obviously contained the food intended for Char’s breakfast. A chilling sight.

“Your majesty, you mustn't blame yourself,” Gellert urged, “He was doing his job, which was to protect you from this sort of attack.”

“It is very true, King Charmont,” said Marcellus, one of Char’s chief advisors. He had dark circles under his reddened eyes, but he was more concerned with his ruler’s woe than his own.

This, too, seemed to cut Char like a poisoned dagger. “That’s not good enough, not nearly,” he insisted. “How was this crime allowed to be carried out under our noses? With all our security measures and our careful protocols? I had so fervently hoped the time of such murderous atrocities in our court had passed along with my Uncle.”

Marcellus and the three other advisors, plus two knights who were on guard duty, all tried to console the young monarch, but Char wouldn't hear a word of it.

"Charmont, every powerful leader will have attempts upon his life, more frequently than you perhaps expected. You must meet this attack in kind as soon as–" Gellert almost regretted his sage advice when Char glared at him, as if Gellert had slapped his face.

"If I hadn't been gallivanting around the countryside with you," he hissed. "Ned might be alive right now. Surely – perhaps, I could have done something…I was so irresponsible."

He was indeed determined to blame himself. It burned in Gellert, worse than the boy's lashing out at him, that the boy insisted on suffering for what could not possibly be his fault and most likely never could have been foreseen or prevented.

"Sire, if you will forgive me for mentioning it," said Sir Bernard solemnly, "You have indeed instilled such strong security since your reign began, it is unfathomable for such a crime to occur in this bold manner. Something highly unusual is at play here. We would be remiss not to consider what other changes occurred at the palace before this crime took place. *New arrivals*, and such…"

The knight's gaze flickered over to Gellert, who had been about to agree with the helpful and restorative speech, up until he became an apparent suspect of one of the few crimes where he was innocent.

"*Excuse* me?" Gellert snapped coldly.

Just then, and as Char glanced between his knights, servants and lover, the doors behind them opened to admit Ella, followed by Gellert's assistants, Crimley and Juneberry.

Incensed to see how that offensive and impudent knight gave the same suspicious look to the Minister of Magic's staff, Gellert scowled as if he had never so much as killed an insect in his whole, highly moral, respectable life.

Loftily, he said, "Myself and my assistants had nothing to do with this dreadful attack, and the mere suggestion is abhorrent to the point of treason. If his majesty trusts me–"

"Treason?" repeated Marcellus. "You've got a nerve–"

"That I have," Gellert retorted angrily. "If his majesty trusts us enough to invite us here as esteemed and cherished guests, who are you, precisely, to question his great wisdom?"

Meanwhile, Ella ran to Char and threw her arms around him in a tight hug, crying her heart out. "Oh, it's so terrible, poor Ned…." and all manner of such simpering drivel began to pour from the girl onto Char, along with copious tears.

Ella was already on thin ice with Gellert for *existing*, firstly, having nearly wed Char and having more of a personal history with him, now apparently she was trusted while Gellert could be easily left out in the cold. His eyes narrowed as Char gently pulled back and murmured some words of comfort to his friend.

Belatedly, he noted the argument happening between Gellert and his own servants and guards. Furthermore, Crimley had now chimed in with a “Sir Bernard, it is hardly your place” of his own, while Juneberry barreled in, “Really, you must know, the Minister is practically a saint, and totally incapable of such an awful act of violence!”

While no words had ever been less true, and the sound of her voice was still like an icepick through Gellert’s already exhausted brain, he nodded sternly. “Yes, I must insist that you cease your obnoxious accusations.”

“Everyone, just stop,” Char demanded, putting his hands out, one in front of the guests, the other in front of his own people, of course save for Ella. “There’s no time for casting undue aspersions on either side. The task at hand depends on us keeping our wits about us and not dissolving into arguments that will only allow this killer to go undetected. With every second that passes, the evidence ages. What do we know so far? Which dish held the poison?”

“It was in the fruit, sire,” said Marcellus, “We have sent for a fairy who specializes in potions to help us determine its substance and origin.”

“That’s good,” Char said under his breath, crouching to examine Ned’s body. He winced and put his head in his hand. “Did he suffer much?”

“No, your majesty,” Sir Bernard explained, “It was almost instant death.”

“A poisoned apple,” Gellert frowned, the clouds of irritated jealousy fleeing for the moment as he noticed the fruit near Ned’s outstretched hand. “As in Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden.”

At the perplexed looks of Lamians around them, Gellert expounded, “In our world, there is a famous, ancient religious text which states that the first man and woman to exist brought ruination to a garden of natural perfection by defying God’s law. They ate the fruit of the forbidden tree.”

Char sighed. “This could be a message, directed at me. This could be about us.” He turned his intense blue gaze on Gellert. “About whether we should be making an alliance with your world. And sharing our resources…risking vulnerability to find strength in this new bond.”

Gellert nodded. “My thought as well. However, it may also be a mere distraction. There’s a certain showmanship in the whole affair that makes it seem…artificial…insincere.”

“You may be getting that feeling because the killer essentially murdered a stand-in or double of me,” Char replied, brow furrowing as he stood up again.

“It’s doing something without actually doing it; it is the threat of what is to come, and it is theatre,” Gellert determined. “I simply don’t yet know where to turn for the program, but rest assured, your majesty, there is a script. We will become pawns if we allow ourselves a moment’s passivity.”

“What would you suggest, then?” Char inquired.

“A spell of truth,” Gellert reasoned. “I question everyone who could possibly be the culprit or have witnessed key evidence. They won’t be able to lie, not even to exaggerate.”

“Such magic, would it hurt those you interrogate?” Char asked, “I cannot risk anything happening to another of my subjects now. I already failed to protect one of my most trusted servants.”

Gellert bit back the words, “a servant whose job it was to protect you,” as he could see it was pointless to try and assuage the boy’s guilt.

“There would be a small, but harmless pain in the extraction of their honest testimony,” Gellert explained. “It generally passes quickly afterwards, with a mild headache the only common complaint.”

“But how can you know the side effects won’t be far more severe in Lamia than in your realm?” Char shook his head. “I don’t think we can risk it, Gellert.”

“I don’t mind going first, Minister, as a test subject.” Oliver Crimley spoke up in his usual, crisp, snobby manner. He stood with his pale hands folded in front of his solid black suit and robes, an adult version of an aspiring teacher’s pet.

“Ollie, anything c0uld happen!” Juneberry fretted, tugging his sleeve.

Crimley pulled himself free of the petite redhead’s grip and grumbled, “I’ve told you not to call me that. No one calls me that.”

“Thank you, Crimley,” said Gellert with a solemn nod. The young man offering to serve as a test subject was merely convenient, but he feigned more care for his employees than he felt as a force of habit.

Except for Char, he still didn’t feel much for anyone else, even basic human care for safety. That made his quickly growing affection for the King even more frightening: it took up all the space there was in his heart. It even tried to fill his emotions past what his heart could hold, and it hurt unreasonably.

The feelings threatened to make him abandon all reason. He was on the edge of losing control over this murder, only able to restrain himself because he knew that right now, it would push Char away.

The thought that his lover might have died at the hands of a vicious assassin had him bloodthirsty and insanely protective, his overflowing heart screaming that he must destroy the killer and make sure the boy was truly safe, for good.

Forever. As if he would not leave Char’s side. And now, the hounds of hell could not drag him away if the boy was in danger.

“Is the plan amenable to you, my King?” Gellert swallowed hard at the tear-stained, wobbly-lipped, big-eyed look Char gave him.

“Yes, it has to be, I suppose. Thank you, Mr. Crimley, for volunteering. There’s no difference in human physiology between our realms, so this should tell us if it will be safe to use this magic on any potential suspects or witnesses…” Char brushed his tears away; Ella took his hand and squeezed it. He returned the gesture, then squared his shoulders, turning stoic.

“Where shall we proceed?”

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The questioning took place in a large meeting room, with a long table covered in a teal cloth, large windows revealing the bright, perhaps deceptively cheerful new day, and more proud Lamian crests on hung tapestries covering stone walls.

Char sat down at the head of the table and folded his hands; Gellert had Crimley sit a few chairs away, and then he took out his wand. “For magic this delicate and precise, I prefer to steer it with an instrument,” he clarified.

There had been some brief arguments as to this plan’s morality or efficacy posed by Char’s council, but several of them agreed with their King that it was the most direct approach to the investigation. With a more severe look than Gellert had ever seen on him, the lovely boy had reminded his staff that at the end of the day, all decisions fell to his will and his alone, as ruler. He must exert this rule so infrequently that everyone immediately fell back in their debates and objections at his command.

Juneberry had been pacing like a ninny, that is to say even more so than usual, an *extreme* amount of ninnyishness which prompted Gellert’s left temple to pulse in pained annoyance. However, he was too focused on the spell to allow his consciousness to wander, even to bestow another mean remonstrance to her.

As a result, and since King Char and the other Lamians in the room were all more concerned than irritated by her wandering the room and muttering to herself, she was allowed to continue the self-indulgent mini-tirade against the impromptu magical inquisition, unhindered.

Gellert’s notice was just barely tugged, however, at the distinct sensation of a counterspell attempting to override his own soon after he began questioning Crimley. Each time the man started to answer one of Gellert’s questions honestly, he stopped short halfway through the sentence, without revealing anything, and changed course, replacing the truth with a bland falsehood.

The Minister glanced subtly at Char, who was already regarding Juneberry with new suspicion. She was standing stock still now, lips unmoving, eyes completely focused on Crimley’s rigidly composed face. It dawned on Gellert that her act of being a ninny was just that, and furthermore she was probably the killer and attempting to hide it by subverting the spell. Even without knowing it, Crimley might have seen evidence that, if found again, would help them trace the murder back to her.

Gellert wrestled for about three seconds with the “why” of her crime. He quickly concluded that the attack on the royal taster had been intended to make sure the poison worked before

using it on Char. And this made his whole inner world erupt into flames of angry vengeance.

The poisoning spell could be cast on any object that would have direct contact with the intended victim, so Juneberry could have used a different method of delivery the next time, surprising them all with Char's assassination. He was going to destroy her.

He released Crimley from the spell, not a moment too soon, as the two opposing magics hitting the man at once could easily have distorted his mind forever after. Another pointed glance to Char communicated his realizations so entirely that Gellert felt shockingly torn between amazement at their silent understanding of each other and rage towards his junior assistant.

Juneberry let out a low sigh and her body relaxed slightly. "Of course Ollie doesn't know anything, he wasn't even around at breakfast, he slept late."

"How dare you? I repeat, how *dare* you, Juneberry?" Crimley jolted up as if propelled by lightning and pointed at his coworker wrathfully. It was one of the worst insults she possibly could have come up with for this type A workaholic wizard, and had the expected effect. "I most certainly did not – *sleep - late!* Furthermore, if you call me Ollie one more time, there's going to be another murder to investigate shortly."

"I don't think we'll need to investigate any more murders, Oliver, and calm down immediately." Gellert calling him "Oliver" allerted Crimley to the seriousness of the moment, even more serious than defending himself from a charge of sleeping late. "In all the time I've known you, your professionalism has never faltered, a true testament to how outrageously annoying this woman truly is. Now, Miss Juneberry."

Gellert stood, towering over her, an imposing sight although they were on opposite sides of the big table. "What did you not want us to know about what Mr. Crimley might have seen this morning? Your counterspells are not so subtle as your overblown ego has apparently suggested to you."

He gave her a grim, know-it-all smile, and she threw up her arms. "Fine, I suppose you caught me, but if you had any idea what it's like to grow up with a rich and famous father who never respected your dreams or any part of you, only to end up shackled in employ to a cruel tyrant like you, Gellert Grindelwald…! I wasn't about to stand by and allow you to form a powerful new alliance with another magical realm, not if I could ruin it and you at the same time."

"Are you admitting that you poisoned my breakfast, Ms. Juneberry, in order to try and frame the Minister?" Char stared at her. "I'm going to have to ask you to hand over your wand."

The knights stepped forward in case they were needed in order to make the arrest, but Juneberry gave over the wand without a problem.

"Your majesty, she can do more wandless magic than that one trick we just witnessed," Gellert said flatly, never taking his eyes from his definitely-fired junior aide. He never would have guessed she was powerful and skilled enough a witch for that, but natural talent hadn't

made her any less deranged. “But you, Juneberry, you spoiled child, are far outmatched. So, don’t fight us. Don’t even try. You’ll only make this worse for yourself.”

“Come along peaceably,” Sir Bernard ordered. “You are under arrest for the murder of Ned Goldfinch, and for the planned murder of our beloved ruler, King Charmont.”

Hatred made his words flinty, an emblematic representation of the love all Lamians bore their king. Gellert could not blame them.

Even with her outrageous shenanigans, Gellert assumed Juneberry was not so stupid as to cast another wandless spell when he was onto her and already about a second away from killing her for one wrong move. He almost hoped that she’d try it, giving him an excuse to cut her down, but he didn't hope it because of the danger to Char.

Right when the guards were about to escort her to the dungeon, Juneberry gave Gellert a terrible, hate-filled smile, and then Char spoke his lover’s name in a panic. He rushed to Gellert and stepped in front of him protectively, expecting that he could talk the criminal down. But instead, she cast the spell regardless and it hit Char full on.

He crumpled where he stood, having fallen into a deep sleep. Gellert caught him and gently placed him in a chair, his heartbeat raging uncontrollably.

“What have you done?” almost everyone in the room demanded, but Gellert did not.

He checked Char’s pulse, making sure the boy was alive and well, just in a state of magically induced sleep. Affirming this, he stood so quickly that everyone gasped as he muttered darkly, “*Crucio!*”

As he had hoped, Cruciatus was twice as effective in Lamia. The place might be populated by an almost universally moral people, but the magic in the air had no allegiance; it was raw power to be harnessed for any purpose a witch or wizard directed it to.

Juneberry twitched and screamed like a bug being burned alive, which was essentially how Gellert saw her. He was going to crush her to death, but first–

“What did you do? Fix it!” he demanded, eyes blazing, “And I’ll stop.”

“No, you w-won’t,” she said, her back sliding down the wall as she fell to the floor.

Gellert reasoned coldly, “It’s your only chance to find out.”

“I mean, I don’t actually care,” she crowed with a deranged laugh, “I wanted to murder the King to pin it on you, and now I’ll leave him in a sleep that eventually will become a coma. It will hold him captive for the rest of his life. This is better. You’ll suffer more, even if I die to make it happen, it’s enough for me–”

“You despicable little *bitch,*” Crimley said sharply.

“Yes,” Juneberry grinned, her features distorted with hate and violent cruelty. “Shame about that for you, Minister Grindelwald, and for your handsome young King. It really is a treat to

find you're besotted with Charmont. This is going to hurt you so much more than you could ever hurt me –"

"*Crucio*," Gellert repeated, using the curse five more times to its ultimate intensity, until the spell had torn her apart inside her own skin. Her body let out awful crunching sounds until it gave out in less than a minute, and he gave her one last loathing look. He did not even need "Avada Kedavra."

"She never would have given us the remedy, sir," Crimley said in about as sad a voice as he had probably ever used since Gellert had known him.

"No, she would not have. It's safer that she's dead." Gellert ran a hand shakily over his now disheveled hair.

Although shocked to their cores, none of the Lamians argued. Instead, Marcellus expressed their prime concern by asking, "Is there any way to learn what the cure for this spell is, Minister?"

Gellert was so distraught that he first had to shove down, with great difficulty, the urge to cry. He took a deep breath, bracing himself against the anguish of Char being in such peril.

"Please, Mr. Grindelwald, there must be something," Ella said softly. Her voice was worn from crying out in fear when Char was cursed, then horror at Juneberry's excruciating demise.

Char's friend had gone with a grieved expression to Char's side after he was struck by the spell. She held the King's hand and wept. Gellert met her eyes and in them, saw no pretense of romantic intentions towards Char. She simply adored Charmont as her best friend, purely, and in her fear, in that genuine and personal love, Gellert could empathize and dismiss, for the time being, his ongoing, mild jealousy towards her.

"Yes." Gellert knelt in front of Char again, this time focusing his energy, with every follicle of his magical power attempting to examine the specific spell used by Juneberry. "It's as she said, a sleep that will gradually fade to a coma. The curse, while obviously forbidden, is so common that there are countless variations. No way to know what the counterspell is, except for one thing."

Ella looked at him as bewilderment changed to revelation and she said, "Magic is different here!"

"Yes. In my world, perhaps this whole crime spree, beginning with the death of Ned, would have had a biblical symbolism to it. The poisoned apple, as in Eden, the sacrifice of Christ to protect his beloved humans." Gellert could barely think about how Char had protected him, it was too upsetting, too precious and wonderful, too scary. "But looking at him now, can we doubt these curses have changed and taken on a fairy tale design?"

"He's not Eve, he's Snow White," Ella murmured. "Does that mean he can be awakened with a kiss? It couldn't be that simple, right?"

Gellert felt joy rise in him such as he had never known. She was right. Char, with his cherry red lips, sleep-pale skin and beautiful, soft brunette curls, was the very image of Snow White, but lovelier than any artist could render, even in the most elaborate ambition.

Gellert marveled, "Juneberry betrayed herself by underestimating the power of Lamia's magic compared with her own. She couldn't influence the manner in which Lamian enchantment would interact with her spell, and inadvertently used one of the spells most guaranteed to be cured through fairy tale logic. All he needs is true love's kiss."

"We must get the word out immediately!" Marcellus decreed. "Far and wide, until we find the King's soulmate. Everyone compatible in age and disposition with King Char should be brought to the palace at once…we can draw up a list of qualifications, perhaps."

"I think not," Gellert defied him smoothly. "And I think, if you even attempt to enact such a plan and allow simpletons to descend en masse to the palace and try to *kiss* King Charmont, you shall regret it immediately. I would make sure of it. No one is to cure this boy but the only one who truly loves him."

Beneath his obvious ego and ruthless threats, Gellert's sincere, passionate love for Char shone through so boldly that he could no longer deny it to himself or anyone else. He knew now he had never truly fooled his heart into believing this was a fling. The idea of ever leaving his beloved boy was absurd and so tragic that it was worse than death to Gellert.

"You," Ella whispered, "You're the one who really loves him."

"Can it be?" Sir Bernard said in surprise.

"I've certainly never seen him look at anyone like *that,*" Crimley remarked with a shrug. "It's more possible than I would have guessed."

"Love was impossible for me; love even hated me until there was him," said Gellert with a melancholy, reflective, almost wistful smile. A smile which his former self would have slapped off his face in shame. The feeling of true love warmed his heart and kept it beating as he gently cradled Char's face and leaned in to kiss him.

Char's lips were feverishly warm but as sweet as ever. Instinctively, as the King stirred just a little, enough to cause Gellert indescribable relief, he turned his face into the kiss to prolong it.

"Gellert," Char sighed, his voice like the softest petals. "You're here."

"I'm here for you, my King," Gellert smiled as almost everyone around them declared joy and relief.

Crimley just sat down and started working on his reports for the day, probably glad his employer would not be going on a murder rampage through the adorable fairy tale kingdom. That would simply not bode well for the reelection campaign if word got back to England.

"Char, I'm so glad you're alright," Ella sighed as the friends hugged.

“And…forgive me, but how is that?” Char asked groggily, his consciousness returning as his mind cleared. “It felt almost like…you kissed me, Gellert, and that woke me up.”

“True love’s kiss,” Gellert told him.

“It must really be what happened,” Char grinned. “You seem so awfully smug about it.”

With that, he let Gellert help him to his feet before immediately throwing his arms around the older man and kissing him tenderly, with all the love in a heart which now, Gellert believed beat for him and him alone.

Everyone in the room clapped at this happy “ending” for what was once a dreadfully dark fairy tale. Once again, Crimley was slow on the uptake, looking up in confusion before noticing the King and Minister of Magic “making out.” He vaguely patted his hands together in his version of congratulatory “applause.” Ella was the opposite, bouncing a little on her heels and grinning.

Many more kisses followed, during which the two men could not care less if there were a lot of other people in the room watching. Then, parting from the boy’s lips only for breath, Gellert muttered, “One moment,” and spelled the unfortunate sight of Juneberry’s twisted corpse away to the palace crypt. “That’s better.”

He and Char kissed again, and then the younger man said ardently, “You asked me a question earlier and I never got to answer. You asked if I regretted last night. And I wanted you to know that it was the best night of my life, and I’ll never regret it. I love you, Gellert.”

“As I adore you, my darling boy.” Gellert felt the truth of the words pierce his emotional armor until it fell away. He might never be vulnerable to anyone else in the universe, but with this beautiful, innocent young King, he was devotion personified.

“I told you he might make a fine romantic prospect,” Ella recalled cheerfully. Although her face was still tear-stained from the terrifying ordeal she had witnessed, a happy ending for her best friend was enough to heal most of her shock.

“You did indeed, and deserve credit for the excellent suggestion, Ella.” Char laughed. He paused in confusion, still piecing everything together, and added, “Gellert, why did Juneberry do all of this?”

“Oh. She wanted to ruin my position as Minister, as vengeance for me being an unpleasant boss,” Gellert explained, rolling his eyes. “Pathetic.”

“You’re a wonderful boss, sir,” Crimley said robotically.

“Shut up, Crimley,” Gellert snapped.

Char covered a laugh in his hand at the evidence of Gellert’s amazing “kindness” towards his employees.

“Wait, Gellert,” the King said suddenly when they were leaving the room. “Oh, not literally, wait.” Everyone had stopped short and almost collided into each other comically. “We can

keep walking. But I suggest we go directly to the dining room. Is Ned's body still there?"

"Indeed, sire," said Marcellus, "The fairy deduced that the spell involved a deadly toxin, similar to one frequently used during your uncle's more reprehensible time in power. It was wielded by his evil minions in poisoning combs, the lacings of dresses and other common items. It is undetectable until it is too late, she said."

"Yes. Save for a green light that exudes from the cursed object, but that passes quickly. You have to pay attention. Paranoia can be a good thing sometimes." Char recognized the type of poison as the one used by his uncle to curse his crown on coronation day. "It's marvelously effective for a spell so simply undone. We may assume that the same spell Juneberry flung at me is the one she used to poison the apple. So we should summon Ned's lady love here at once, Rhona, I believe her name is. She is a kitchen maid."

"A kiss, my King?" Gellert remarked. "To wake your royal taster?"

"I won't blame him if he quits his job," Char laughed with a sigh.

"My brilliant boy, I shall be here by your side to protect you from now on. You won't need any such measures to shield you from evil-doers."

The servants happily began the process of restoring Ned to consciousness, reversing Juneberry's villainy completely. Meanwhile, Gellert walked Char to his room with an arm snugly around the boy.

***

2. I let myself go

He was never letting Char out of his arms again. A crazy thought, but he could not block it out. Perhaps he no longer wanted to. Surrender felt so unexpectedly sweet.

"By the way, your plan to shield me from all evil-doers?" Char asked slyly. "I thought that was quite interesting. Aren't you…a bit of a villain yourself?"

"Oh, dear boy, you genuinely have no idea how much of a villain I can be when I feel that extreme measures are justified in order to get, keep and protect what I want. Don't you see that this makes me the ultimate consort, and personal protector of your royal majesty?" Gellert raised his eyebrows as they reached the door of the King's private rooms.

The huge golden door with its bejeweled floral design was one of the grandest works of architectural wonder in the stunning palace. Many would be overwhelmed by the grandeur and pressure of the royal life and loving a royal, but Gellert just couldn't wait to get inside and show Char more of his everlasting love.

"That sounds like…a job I haven't offered you yet." Char opened the door and gave Gellert his most adorably teasing smile. "The job of…*husband?*"

"Hmm." Gellert conjured a ring from thin air, and the King stared at the glittering gold and diamonds in amazement.

“Gellert,” Char said, overwhelmed, “What in the world –”

The older man was already on one knee, mirroring the posture from their first meeting. It had been foreshadowing for their love story, after all.

“Prince Charmont of Lamia,” Gellert said solemnly, now holding the ring up while using his free hand to caress Char’s. “Will you marry me?”

“But Gellert…your position as Minister back in your realm!” Char fell to his knees in front of Gellert, putting his hands on either side of his lover’s face with a sigh. “You know I can’t abandon my throne here in Lamia. How could we make it work?”

“All this time, without regard for common sense or logic, we’ve allowed love to build and build until now, it’s the only fortress home around us, no matter where we may be at any given time.” Gellert gave him a complicated, emotional smile. “As for two rulers, two kingdoms, well then, my King. It sounds to me like you are talking about a vast amount of combined power. Can that be a detriment?”

The sun shone through the regal stained glass windows behind them, making colors flicker across Charmont’s exquisite face – royal blue, yellow-gold, emerald green. Each shade embraced and highlighted a new fluctuation of overwhelming joy in those adorable features which had Gellert so entirely beside himself with a need to possess.

“I…can only rarely leave my own realm,” Char continued, but he seemed more hopeful now.

“You’ll have a husband who can take you anywhere we like at the speed of light, sweet boy. And while it’s true I have only just purchased a rather large and impressive home in my world, well…I think I much prefer your palace, and being here with you. This can be our home base, as it were.”

“Oh, Gellert, you don’t have to give up anything for me,” Char shook his head, worried about a silly mansion which Gellert barely remembered wanting.

“Little King, I am not. I’m gaining such happiness as I never fathomed could even exist, much less for me. And I am offering myself, heart and hand, without the need to possess anything, in any realm, once and for all – except for you, Char. As long as you vow to give yourself to me eternally, entirely.”

“Then, I…I…yes,” Char said through happy tears, “I will marry you, my love!”

Gellert slid the ring onto the boy’s lovely hand, where it could not have looked more sublime. Then, somehow, not even realizing when it began, they were kissing again, relentlessly kissing and caressing each other all over. That they were still kneeling on the floor did not seem to matter, but considering Char’s recent ordeal, Gellert sat down and scooped his fiance into his lap for a more comfortable position.

After a while, once again, goodness knew how long, Char pulled back dizzily with kiss-swollen lips and pink cheeks, the diamonds shining on his new ring. “Do you like my room, by the way?”

They both laughed and got up off the floor, having rendered one another's already highly compromised attire almost entirely useless, and having messed up each other's hair nearly to the point of no return.

Gellert admired Char's beautiful living space, the large four poster bed and sky blue decor to match his eyes. It suited Char. The paintings of knights and damsels didn't even bother Gellert anymore. He seemed to have wandered into a fairy tale of his own.

"Your room is wonderful, my love." Gellert smirked at him, "Is the mattress a sturdy one, or should I reinforce it a bit?"

"It's always been sturdy," Char giggled, "But if anyone could threaten it, it is you and your… ahem…various plans for me, you wicked man."

"True, but then you are lucky that I can repair or conjure virtually anything we may need so that I can take your luscious body all night long, my dear King."

Char spun around, bit his lip, nervously looking from the bed back to Gellert, and from Gellert to the bed.

"Darling…would you teach me magic someday?" Char twirled one of his messy curls absentmindedly around his finger. His voice wavered with anxiousness.

Was Char changing the subject a little, to deflect his nervousness about the clearly impending seduction? Completely delighted by every bit of the boy's adorable antics, Gellert replied honestly, "I had already planned on it. An education in the magical arts is vital to my being absolutely certain of your physical safety. If I should ever have to be away from you, even for an hour, I won't have a moment's peace unless I have thoroughly trained you in defensive spells."

"I'm not always the most attentive student," Char admitted ruefully, fidgeting again, now ruffling his curls. "But for you, I shall try. I hope I don't disappoint."

"You won't. I have ways to make you pay attention, and punishments for transgressions of missed homework and late arrivals to lessons. You will not have a chance to escape the grip of my educational influence."

"*Oh,* by the Gods, Gellert…" Char turned beet red and then covered his face. "You do arouse me excessively. I've never known anyone like you, nor felt anything like this. It's so much…I feel I must offer you something in return."

"What would you offer me?" Gellert inquired, brows raised, beautifully strange eyes twinkling.

Char backed up towards the bed; Gellert stepped towards him.

"Me," Char suggested.

He sat on the bed and adopted a "seductive" pose, leaning back invitingly. The effect was only slightly spoiled by the huge yawn he let out immediately afterwards. "Take me," he said

anyway, “I’m all yours.”

“That is true,” smiled Gellert.

He came to Char and without further ado lay down with him, sweeping the King’s smaller body up in his arms for a lovely, warm nap. “I think you had better save your energy, little King, as you’ll need it. Rest, now, and when you wake, I will give you a marvelous bubble bath.”

“A *naked* bubble bath,” Char said with another yawn. “Not that, you know, anyone really bathes with clothes on in their own home, but. It is different with you, much different. Naked with you…Mmmm.”

He smiled softly as sleep tugged him slowly but surely into sweet dreams, and Gellert had never seen such a transcendent sight.

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Gellert woke up some indefinable time later, not caring if it were day or night, only caring that Char was not beside him in the bed.

He rose and ventured into the hall, about to use magic to try and find the boy when he nearly walked right into Char as they rounded the same corner from different directions. They had both been walking so quickly that the impact was a bit painful.

“*Ouch!* Goodness me! What in the world are you doing, Gellert?” Char asked, looking perfect in a maroon bathrobe that showed his long, gorgeous neck and his scrumptious upper chest.

Gellert could see the bruises on Char’s neck from his kisses the night before and it made his hunger for more and to feel how much Char was his own start to surge again, restless, insistent.

“I was looking for you. Are you hurt?” Gellert looked him over carefully.

“No, I'm alright. Rather funny, us bumping into each other that way. Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” Gellert said, and grabbed the young king roughly, yanking him close and claiming his lips with wanton lust. “Where were you?”

“Gellert!” Char moaned and laughed. “Oh, dear, we’re in the hallway, I– that is…oh….ah, feels so good, *mmm,* I–”

Gellert, who still wore his tux, without the tie or jacket, continued taking all manner of liberties with the King in pajamas.

“Yes?” Gellert pulled back from his lips, breathing heavily, but he did not move one inch away from Char, keeping the boy’s slighter frame pressed up against him, so he could feel the King getting hard for him, and how his heart hammered in his chest.

“I just popped down to the kitchen to check on Ned and Rhona,” Char explained, cheeks turning a beguiling pink shade as Gellert groped him possessively, feeling his ass and squeezing the plump curve of it, moving against the boy so he knew it would pleasure his hardening cock.

“I didn’t like waking up to find you gone,” Gellert said in a growl.

“Oh, darling,” Char melted against him with whimpers of bliss at the friction of their cocks, the frantic touches, Gellert’s lips on his, and on his neck, animalistic. “I didn’t mean to make you worry about me, but now it makes – *ahhhh!* How did you even *do* that, oh, Gods – ummm it makes sense you’d be worried after this morning’s – Gellert, I can’t talk if you’re going to keep doing that–”

“I want you in bed with me when we wake up,” Gellert repeated, his voice throaty and raw, “Because you’re mine. I don’t know if you realize what that means, boy.”

“I can feel what it means…oh, Gellert, please,” Char pressed his forehead to his lover’s and begged, “I’m the King, I can’t be caught doing indecent things in the palace hallway. Take me to bed, darling, please?”

“You haven’t felt anything yet,” Gellert said gruffly.

With that, he picked Char up and walked briskly to the bedroom carrying the boy in his arms, while the King blushed furiously and made weak objections.

“You’ll hurt your back! Someone will see!”

“No I won’t.” Gellert reached the bedroom and opened the door with magic, closing it behind them the same way before striding in with Char and putting him down on the bed. “And I hope someone did. It won’t be the last time I decide to have you, pick you up and take you wherever I wish. If it wasn’t our first time, I certainly would have had you in the hall just for trying to tell me I shouldn’t.”

“What? Really… Has anyone ever told you that you’re a bit demanding?” Char giggled, elated as Gellert started kissing him absolutely everywhere, hovering above him on the bed and smirking playfully.

Gellert had ignored the question, seemingly, yet moments later he answered it without needing words.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” Char asked, laughing his soft, cutely aroused laugh that only made Gellert want to take him apart twice as hard.

The look in Gellert’s beautiful, unusual eyes could only be referred to as “eye-fucking”; when he let his gaze begin to wander slowly over Char’s trembling form on the bed, the younger man felt the cord on his robe untying itself.

“Ah – Gellert–” Char felt himself growing harder, his cock needy and dripping as the older man undressed him, using magic to render Char entirely bare.

“You’re a very healthy, thriving boy, aren’t you, your majesty,” Gellert teased, kissing and licking Char’s nipples. This seemed to be a favorite hobby of his and perhaps even a fetish, and Char wasn’t complaining!

Moaning, Gellert savored every slow lick and twirl before sucking and biting the sensitive peaks.

Char sighed, “I wasn’t…thriving before you…I was excusing myself to avail of my hand almost on the hour…”

The younger man easily tugged off what remained of his lover’s worn-out tuxedo shirt, yanking it from the trousers and then working on the belt. He was proud of himself that sans magic, he had managed to get Gellert naked on top of him.

“So needy and desperate,” Gellert accused with a satisfied smirk. “I can only imagine how wild I could make you, how loudly you’d beg when I make you wait for it.”

“But…you wouldn’t do that to a nice boy like me,” Char pouted.

“Never forget, my sweet boy, there’s nothing I won’t do for you, however extreme, nowhere I would not go and no force I would not destroy if it blocked my path to you. And there is nothing I won’t do to you, if I know it will bring you pleasure, which is my pleasure as well.”

“Should I expect that some of that pleasure will come from pain?” Char asked, touching the bruises on his neck.

Gellert nodded, more serious now. “Yes, you should, particularly if you tease or disobey me. Even when you are in your most angelic form, though, the bliss you feel when I hurt you just in the right way to arouse and prolong stimulation….I always want that. Can you endure it?”

Char gazed up at him solemnly, then nodded, remaining silent for a few moments, suspended in lustful fear and devotion.

“Say the words, little King,” Gellert told him firmly.

He was so possessive, so big and strong, looming above Char in bed…he seemed to be everywhere, enveloping Char’s soul and owning his body.

Charmont remembered all too well this feeling of Gellert blanketing him in warmth and the manly essence of desire, the feeling of their sweat and arousal mixing, and their cocks, hard and dripping against each other. Gellert’s hairy chest against his bare one, the commanding, yet wild look in the wizard’s eyes.

“I…want you to hurt me whenever you like,” Char said, as if the words surprised him a little. “It isn’t something I ever expected to want, and yet now that we are together…”

He breathed in and out, trying not to get too over-excited already, but it was difficult. Every throb of his rigid dick against Gellert’s when the wizard did not grind them together was sweet torment, exhilarating, tense anticipation. Char sighed, moaning at all of the ways Gellert’s body made his feel, so easily.

“I need it,” he added, and bit his lip, blushing up at his lover shyly.

“That’s a good boy,” Gellert said grittily, grabbing Char in his arms with a rough embrace.

Effortlessly, he rolled them over and lay down with Char straddling him. The King, naked, blushing and laughing nervously, was a sight too decadent for Gellert Grindelwald to take in without serious consequences.

“Kiss me,” Gellert ordered, and Char did, lying on top of him, slowly writhing against Gellert in a subtle rhythm, not taking too much. Their tongues met passionately, Char threading his fingers through soft, silver chest hair as Gellert put both hands on his pert ass and groped, squeezing, massaging, feeling the boy’s soft, smooth skin, pinching the firm muscle.

“What do you want, Charmont?” Gellert asked between hot, relentless kisses, “I want you to tell me, I like to hear you speaking of things that make you blush, giggle and cling to me.”

“I want…” Char turned red and leaned down to whisper in his ear, even though no one but Gellert could hear what he said. “I want to feel you inside me, and for you to make me yours in every way. I want you to teach me how to please you, too.”

“What with today’s events, it’s my impression you will have a bit of time off to rest and recover, your majesty.” Gellert traced Char’s collarbone and gazed up at him expectantly.

“Yes, barring any unlikely emergency, we have some, well, some time, probably a day or two just to make sure I’m completely ready for my royal duties to resume…”

“I have some new royal duties for you, as your betrothed and future consort.” Gellert glanced down at his own throbbing erection suggestively, and Char practically leaped at the obvious invitation. “I wish us to take our time exploring the nature of those duties.”

“Then as your husband-to-be, I must faithfully carry out your commands. What would you have me do?” Char knew he was teasing, but he loved how riled Gellert became with the smallest bit of sassy flirting from him.

He was kissing the older man’s chest, then moving slowly down to his stomach and lower, leaving fluttery, naive, excited little kisses on Gellert’s skin that made the older man groan and shiver in pleasure.

“I would have you suck me, my King,” said Gellert in a low, throaty tone as his hand sunk into Char’s curls. “Until I am so hard that when I am inside you, you will be certain I’ll split you in two. That will be the beginning.”

Char moaned, all sassy-minx sorts of flirtation disappearing from his mind as a confused chaos of lust and need took the place of all other instincts. He licked at Gellert’s huge cock and applied himself to this new art he was learning, so ambitiously that the warm, wet feeling of his mouth moving on Gellert’s aching manhood was only needed for a minute or two.

When Gellert returned the favor, Char really thought he was going to explode or just evaporate into nothing but ecstasy itself, lighter than air, lost to the whole universe except for

Gellert subjecting him to these unbearable delights. Now, the older man's clever fingers were teasing Char's virginal hole, well-lubricated by a predictable bit of magic.

Gellert hummed in happiness at Char's broken moans, simply from a little bit of external teasing. He looked up at the King from between Char's creamy thighs, silver hair mussed and falling into his face. And once he made eye contact with the shivering, bright-eyed boy, Gellert leaned in and licked attentively at his fiance's tight, pink entrance.

Char's thighs and legs immediately began to tremble uncontrollably, so Gellert, with soothing caresses, moved them to lie over his shoulders. This also allowed him deeper access as he lashed his tongue over the boy's hole, teasing again with his fingers before pressing his tongue inside and making Char's whole upper body lift from the bed.

"Gellert! Oh, Gods, I need to feel you inside…your mouth has me half-mad for it…"

Char was the prettiest thing in any realm when he begged. Gellert bit his thigh and licked his precious, perfect smooth skin before answering, "I will have you entirely mad for me in only a few minutes, boy."

It turned out to be as true as Char had expected, as he was soon fucked open slowly and firmly by Gellert's big, powerful fingers, starting with one (it felt like the most he'd ever be able to fit inside him; it felt like too much) and building, somehow – somehow! To three fingers, thrusting harder, deeper, making such euphoric sensations flutter and blossom to life inside him.

Gellert had Char in his lap again, riding his fingers as he thrust them in and the boy ground down, having quickly become helplessly needy for the feeling. They kissed feverishly, Char's nails raking down Gellert's back before his hands pressed into his fiance's skin, leaving fingerprints. Sweaty, lost in a daze of unbelievable sensation, Char kept fucking himself on the older man's hand until Gellert growled and pressed his fingers to that perfect, lovely, mysterious center of pleasure inside him over and over – and –

Char's head flew back and he cried out weakly as his hole clamped down on Gellert's fingers. His cock spilled between them as he quivered and mewled, and Char, through the white hot blur of emotion and such, such rapture – heard himself begging again.

"My love, I need all of you, now," he pleaded, strong in his meaning and determination, ardent in his yearning, but soft and meek at the same time.

It was all Gellert could do to bear such perfection. He grasped the boy tightly and expertly guided Char onto the rigid length of his painfully hard cock. "Slowly, now, that's a good boy – still sensitive, aren't you? It's more than you can handle. But look how well you are doing…"

Gellert soothed Char with his big, warm hands massaging his back and feeling his ass in slow worship. As Char stared into those exotic, compelling eyes, feeling the hands on him that could wreak such havoc and take such power, he felt an equally passionate obsession take him over.

“It’s so good, Gellert, so much of everything I need –” Char took more of Gellert, moving slowly down and up again, feeling how his lover stretched him wide open. Closing his eyes, he trembled with the most fragile little moan.

“Too much,” he admitted, panting. “Please, you have to show me…take me.”

Gellert grabbed hold of Char and turned them so that the boy lay beneath him and he could fill his fiance with every hot, hard inch.

The sheets beneath their bodies had been cloud-soft, but they were damp now with so much sweat and precum. The spicy scent of Gellert’s cologne and his hot, insistent body were taking over Char’s senses completely – and the sight of Gellert’s handsome, elegant face expressing such human, vulnerable, powerful sensations of love and pleasure – no composure at all, just animal hunger, too much indeed to be sated. But Gellert would chase this pleasure between them to and past its limit anyway; Char knew it.

Char felt it as Gellert filled his fiance entirely at last, then guided the boy to wrap arms and legs around his muscular body and “hold on tight as you can, beautiful King. You’re mine, aren’t you?”

“I’m yours,” Char almost sang out, the sugary tone in his own voice taking him by surprise, as if it belonged to someone else. Someone bolder who knew how to make love and satisfy an impressive, astonishing man like this. That was the moment Char realized he was doing that, and he already was that boy. How extraordinary.

“Good boy, that’s it, take it just like – that – *yes,*" Gellert grunted and gasped, and for this first time they just moved by wild, unstoppable instinct, their bare forms rolling in the sheets, tangling them until they’d laugh, kick them away and moan again into each other’s mouths.

“Yours,” Char moaned again, “Anything you want, Gellert, please…”

His adventurous, eager wish to be shown more of this new art made Gellert growl, repositioning the boy to lie over the side of the bed with his ass up in the air, offered to Gellert. Char’s fingers dug into the sheets as he felt undone by his self-conscious hyperawareness of this position, so much naughtier, much more – just – raw…he submitted with a near-scream of bliss when Gellert penetrated him again this way, standing behind him, gripping his slender, delicate hips.

“Anything I want? You are asking for trouble, your majesty…” the growling, rough tone and mischievous words made Char look back at him, gasping.

Gellert looked unbelievable, solidly fucking Char on his enormous cock, the glide of their two bodies slick, effortless and hard, harder – Gellert rammed into him, leaning over Char to pull his hair and bite his neck. “Do you like the feeling of trouble? Getting – ah! What you asked for, sweet little King?”

Char wept and nodded, shaking and moaning as Gellert gave it to him much harder than ever, making him feel every thick inch stretching him, owning him, igniting such pleasure, the younger man did not know it could get even better. But then he felt a warm burst of wetness

inside him as his fiance orgasmed, clutching Char, biting his neck again. Gellert's teeth sank into Char's shoulder, too, relishing the way the boy whimpered in agonizing bliss. Then he leaned back and just fucked Char, pummeling the boy with a thrill of ruthless claiming.

Gellert found Char's cock at the same time and stroked it, needing no coordination in his own overwhelmed state to bring his lover off one more time.

Char came again and lost all sense of shame or self-consciousness, even as he let out ridiculous keening cries and soaked Gellert's hand in his cum. The older man just used the added lubrication to keep stroking smoothly, taking Char right to the brink between pleasure and overstimulation, where the boy discovered even more new depths of love and submission.

"Feels amazing," Char said, wrecked, red in the face, barely able to form words or move, just never wanting this to end, wishing he could experience every part of this lovemaking at the same time, but each individually, to appreciate the depth and special qualities of the pleasure. "Oh, Gellert…you'll make a mess of me, won't you? Forevermore."

"Have you any objections, my King?" Gellert's voice was about as wrecked as Char felt, which made the younger man grin as they held each other in bed afterwards.

"Only one," Char smirked, kissing him. "I was promised a marvelous bubble bath–"

Of course, a moment later Char found himself immersed in the most heavenly bath imaginable, and Gellert was there behind him, hugging him close, kissing his now wet neck and feeling Char's body under the water.

"Hey, I –" Char squeaked, looking around in confusion before giving into everything once again. "You truly are the most wicked man," he laughed. "I didn't expect that."

The sumptuous, floral scent of the frothy bubbles and the perfect heat of the water were soothing, but the erotic fact of Gellert insatiably mouthing at his neck, not even bothering to explain himself, distracted Char from relaxation.

The golden designs of dancing nymphs on the pale blue walls of his familiar bathroom seemed to swirl and blur as Char melted into Gellert's every touch and kiss.

"Expect the unexpected," Gellert said, sliding his open palm over Char's wet, soapy pectoral, then teasing the boy's nipples with his slippery fingers. "Oh, *kleiner liebling*, you're all I can want…"

Char's eyes widened in curiosity, so Gellert laughed huskily and whispered in his ear, "*little darling.* You speak of me surprising you, but you must feel how much you astound me in return."

"I think so. I think," Char said, looking up reverently to admire his fiance as he pressed even closer to Gellert's body. "You won't recognize yourself when you're with me. And…you won't recognize…the things you feel."

The King was repeating the words which Gellert had used during their moonlight tryst. Fated patterns of their love were already growing, filling the skies of their understanding like a limitless collection of sparkling constellations. Their whole lives were mapped out now, taking them galaxies away from the dull expectations they had both dwelt in before meeting.

“You’re right,” Gellert admitted, whispering again, “I don’t.”

“Gellert,” Char sighed, “I love you.” After kissing his fiance, he added slyly, “And I have to confess, I need a bit more instruction as… I know nothing of making love in the bath...”

“Really?” Gellert feigned surprise as new mischief brewed in his gaze. “But we’re already here, my King, and look, we’re *naked.* Will wonders never cease?”

With growing confidence, Char turned around and straddled Gellert, loving how good they felt together in the steamy water. He draped his arms almost lazily around his fiance’s neck and raised his eyebrows. “No, Gellert Grindelwald, now that we’ve found each other, I believe that wonders will never, ever cease."

End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next time: a moonlit horseback ride to explore the countryside gives Char and Gellert a chance to explore the strange tension between them. Later, a dangerous mystery in the royal court makes both men fully realize their feelings and do all they can to hold onto each other. (Chapter 2 is quite smutty and Chapter 3 will probably be smuttier 😌)

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Enchanted Beasts playlist: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/7E2zUCQMPg0bgMBakNsl4j?si=1852a1ffd0194db5

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